

The TRACK of  
THE WAR

SCOTLAND LIDDELL

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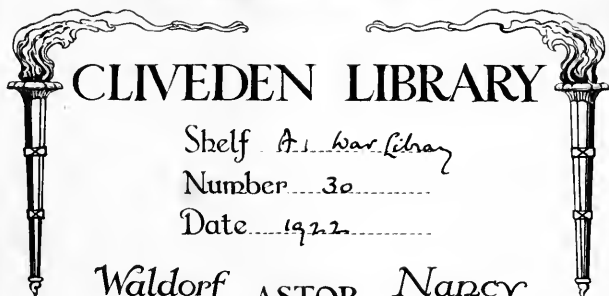
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R. SCOTLAND LIDDELL.

# THE TRACK OF THE WAR

By

R. SCOTLAND LIDDELL

Author of "Germany's Carnival of  
Cruelty," etc.

With Special Notes by

CAPTAIN ALBERT DE KEERSMAECKER  
of Belgium

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To  
MY DEAR MOTHER





## PREFACE

**I**T is difficult for me to express my thanks to my good friend, Captain Albert de Keersmaecker, of Belgium, for the great assistance he has given me in the preparation of this book. Without his kindness in allowing me to travel with him in Belgium, it would have been impossible for me to have gone more than a few miles outside Antwerp, and these on foot. Any information I wanted I would have been compelled to gather in the cafés of the city from soldiers returned from the front, and in the hospitals from wounded men with somewhat hazy ideas as to what had really happened. For my geographical facts, for the translations of important papers, and for a hundred other things, I am indebted to my friend.

Of the personal bravery and the largeness of heart of Captain de Keersmaecker, of his cheerfulness under circumstances of gloom and horror, of his sympathy and tenderness towards the wounded men and the sick and the homeless, no words of mine can tell.

To Commandant Davreux, Equerry to King Albert, I owe my sincere thanks for many of the exclusive photographs published herein. These pictures were taken expressly for the King of the

Belgians, and it is indeed a privilege for me to have permission to use them here.

Many of the other photographs were taken by myself, but there are still others for which I must thank the Editor of the *Daily Mirror*, who has very kindly allowed me to reproduce them.

Finally, I am very grateful to Mr. Perriton Maxwell, Editor of *Nash's* and *Pall Mall Magazine*, not only for his letting me include in my book some of my contributions to his magazine, and the accompanying photographs, but also for very many personal kindnesses to me at many times.

R. SCOTLAND LIDDELL.

LONDON,

*December, 1914.*

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## CHAPTER I

### THE MODERN BATTLEFIELD

**I**N the corner of the Grand Place in Furnes, there is a fine old building whose name I do not know. There is a tall, solitary spire overlooking the town and forming with the square tower of the Church of St. Nicholas across the Place a landmark that is seen for miles away. From a little gallery near the top of the spire, one can look down upon the nestling town and out, eastwards, across West Flanders.

On the tenth day of the Battle of the Coast, I entered the ancient building and walked up wide stone steps, past barn-like rooms where soldiers slept on straw-strewn floors, and on up a corkscrew wooden stairway to the zinc-floored balcony on top. Other people were there before me. I found myself breathless beside two ladies, a Belgian gendarme, a young rosy-cheeked English naval man, a private soldier with mud-caked uniform, and a London press photographer. We had three field-glasses amongst us, and for over an hour I watched one of the fiercest battles of the war.

It was a glorious, sunshiny day. Away to the east, in front of us, was the Nieuport-Pervyse-Dixmude line of towns. To our left the sand-dunes and the sea behind a cloud of mist. In front of

us, on the horizon itself, a bank of smoke was rising; through the glasses we could see the flames of burning houses. A few kilometres nearer to us there was a long, dark, horizontal line; the glasses changed it into moving soldiers. And low down in the sky itself, we could see with the naked eye tiny clouds of white and cinnamon and grey-black smoke.

From the sea came the dull boom of big guns; from the streets below the occasional noisy hoot of a passing motor-car, and from the Grand Place the metallic rattle of horses' hoofs on the uneven cobble-stones. Otherwise all was calm. The big guns were British. They were on our side. The burning houses appeared few and far away. The long, dark, horizontal line seemed to remain unbroken. The ladies on the balcony were chatting away merrily. The English boy lit his pipe. The press photographer, who had just come out from England, seemed frankly disappointed and said he was. He wanted "live stuff," he said, and this was as tame an affair as he had ever seen.

Yet that day the Belgian casualties amounted to one thousand men. And at the end of that, the tenth, day of battle, the roll of killed and injured in the Belgian ranks had reached a total of ten thousand. The little clouds of white and cinnamon and grey-black that appeared every few minutes as if by magic were very deadly. Each shrapnel shell whose bursting caused them threw out in a forward fan-shaped direction three hundred bullets.





Ypres Cathedral. "Above the mass of grey-white stone that littered the floor were broken cane chairs and fallen wood."



So that is the Belgian battlefield from afar. Miles of hedgeless, fenceless flat fields ; little groups of artillery behind bushes or rough earth mounds ; tired horses by the roadside in the rear ; rows and rows of entrenched men ; and, above, tiny smoke clouds, hanging balloon-shaped for a moment and then melting out of sight.

The battlefield of old has gone, giving place to one more peaceful in appearance, more terrible in effect. Deadly Science has superseded the hand-to-hand fights of yester-year, when men would strive with sword and spear and knife. The enemy of to-day is an unseen foe : one shoots a shell in space—and out of space come answering fire and deadly hail of shot.

You enter the fighting area. You have a peculiar unconsciousness of danger. It is intensely interesting. The enemy is—you know not how many miles away. You advance—perhaps you simply round a bend in the road—and you come to a wayside cottage where anxious-faced men are grouped in silence. No one speaks. One simply waits. Suddenly a terrible whistling shrieks all round the sky—a whirlwind of shrill, piercing sound—a dull explosion follows, and a cloud of earth and smoke is thrown up by a shell in the field in front. With the whistling men's faces blanch ; with the dull thud, the little group straighten themselves and smile to each other in sudden relief. One man will light a cigarette ; another will produce an apple from his pocket ; a third will hum a quavering little tune. The

whistling shrieks again ; this time the shell lands in the field behind. Men grin. One seems so safe under a roof. There is no real consciousness of danger in one's mind. The whistling in the sky simply numbs one for a moment ; fascinated, one remains rooted to the spot.

Perhaps the troops advance and you reach the position they held some minutes before. Then you find yourself in a hell of dreadful scenes. Shattered horses lie in the traces of wrecked wagons. There are wheelless gun carriages pinning down dead men. The trampled trenches are but uncovered graves. The white-faced wounded wait for the Red Cross men. Some die before help comes ; some try to crawl away ; some staunch their bleeding wounds and stumble off, blinding their eyes to sights they dare not see.

Byron's lines come to mind—

“O God, it is a fearful thing  
To see the human soul take wing  
In any shape, in any mood ;  
I've seen it rushing forth in blood . . .”

Yet Death has left some men in peaceful pose. Some lie as if asleep, their faces calm, their limbs at ease. Others lie stretched with faces down. Some rest as they had been—with rifles pressed to shoulders and sightless eyes peering along the barrels of their guns. But there are others lying in dreadful attitude. Some dead are fallen on dead comrades. Some lifeless bodies are contorted with the agony of death suffering, faces twisted

into ghastly semblances of themselves, hands clenched or curling fingers clinging to the ground.

*And every dead man means a sorrowing woman.*

That is the thought that rushed into my mind. A wife, a sweetheart, a mother. I found myself thinking of those whose days of pain had yet to come. A widow and an orphan child would mourn this man; this calm-faced youth would mean a mother's tears; of these twisted, pain-drawn faces, thank God, no girl would know.

## CHAPTER II

### WAR AND ITS CRIMES

“**W**AR in its essence, and the crimes which usually follow in the wake of war, do not furnish suitable themes for drawing-room talk, nor do they make for calm, philosophic discourse. War at its best is brutal, at its worst a horror to shudder at. But war as interpreted in the acts of the Kaiser’s armed minions is so hideous, so shameful a thing as to make one’s blood boil with indignation and one’s right hand itch with the desire to slay by any means the soulless soldiers of Germany who have perpetrated their foul deeds upon innocent non-combatants and upon helpless women and children.”

No one can possibly exaggerate the unspeakable cruelties visited upon these helpless peoples by the ruthless German hordes. I can believe to-day any tale told me of Germanic inhumanity, no matter how weird, how unthinkable. Thoughts of horrific delirium which one might not have admitted even to one’s self a few short weeks ago have been put into recorded practice by the blood-lusting legions of the Kaiser. I have seen and heard things which have blotted out God’s sunshine from my heart, and that have lowered

my estimate of Prussian mankind to that of the foulest and cruellest of beasts.

At the village of Corbeck Loo, near Louvain, a young woman (she was twenty-two), whose husband had gone off to join the army, was captured by a band of German soldiers. The folks she was with were locked up in an empty house, while she was taken into another building and successively raped by five soldiers. This is but one of thousands of similar instances of German bestiality.

I saw a German prisoner brought into Antwerp, and in a little bag which he wore at his breast, suspended by a cord hung round his neck, there was a prayer-book—a special edition for the German Army. In the same little bag were four blood-stained rings, which he laughingly admitted he had torn from the fingers of a bludgeoned and dying woman.

On a brass plate in front of each German helmet are the words: “Mit Gott für Koenig und Vaterland.”

Yet I know that there were three baby children, between the years of three and five, who were playing with tiny Belgian flags by the wayside between Brussels and Louvain; and I know that these innocent tots were waving their flags, as children would; and I know that some German cavalry, who came along that way, rode amongst them and pierced their sweet white breasts with accursed spears. And I know that the poor old grandmother of the children clattered out of her

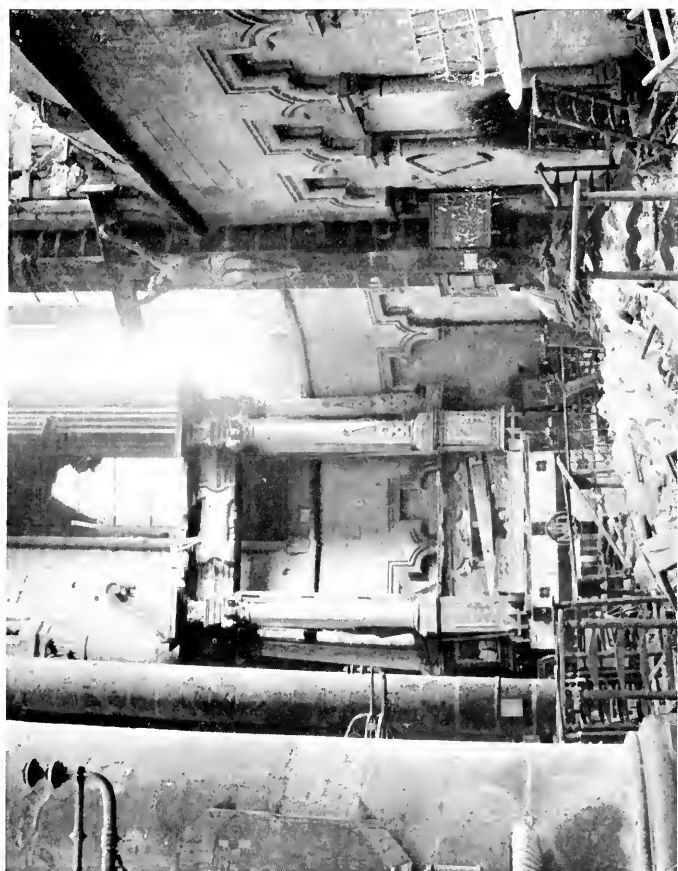
little cottage at the sound of the troops; and I know that the bloody spears killed her also.

I have been in many places in Belgium. I have been in many battles. I have walked amongst the ruins of once-beautiful cities. I have talked with tragic-eyed men and women, and in the piteous exodus of refugees from a stricken land I have carried orphan children in my arms. And the story I have to write of the German advance is one of murder and rape and fiendish torment. It is a story of sheer horror, and the facts are smeared with the blood of innocents. It is the all too true tale of hellish deeds done by human devils.

I must tell you of acts so terrible that it is difficult to write of them. I must tell you of outrages so awful as to shock the soul. And because I must not spare your feelings, I shall write of the fiendish cruelties of which I know, the unspeakable crimes of a "cultured" people who by their deeds have written themselves down as the enemies of God and civilization.

All the world has heard of peaceful French and Belgian villages wantonly destroyed, of towns that have been set ablaze, of the destruction of treasured buildings and priceless books and paintings that can never, never be replaced. All the world has heard of the burning alive of innocent peasants, of how the legless, armless bodies of men were drenched with petroleum and a light applied to them while the poor wretches were still alive. And the world has already been told





“Christ on His Cross above a Calvary of wreckage and desecration.”



of old women who had been found by the fireside of their pillaged cottages, their knitting needles still in their dead hands, their woollen work lying uncompleted in their blood-drenched laps; of women and young girls who have been outraged; and of a thousand other staggering barbarities.

But there are tortures even worse than these. There are tortures of the mind more terrible than physical pain. There are mental agonies more awful than bodily suffering. There are those living who would be better dead. In Belgium to-day there are men and women who have gone stark mad with the shuddering horror of the sights they have seen. There are half-witted peasants who wander aimlessly among the blackened ruins of their burnt-out villages, falling to their knees on the approach of the mildest stranger, and screaming out prayers for mercy. I have come suddenly upon such scenes. They are living nightmares, and I shall remember them always.

The Germans, you must know, do not do things by halves. They are boastful of their efficiency in all things. It was not enough at Corbeck Loo that a schoolgirl should have been forced to drink wine by a number of German soldiers. It was not enough that she should then have been raped successively by these incarnate devils on the lawn in front of her home. It was not enough that her poor breasts should have been pierced with their bayonets because she struggled with her seducers. God in Heaven, no! the Germans do not do things by halves. They left out nothing.

They held the girl's father and mother all the time so that they should writhe under the agony of witnessing the proceedings.

You see the thoroughness of their methods. They have not merely assaulted young married women; they first of all bound their husbands and placed them so that they could "see the fun." They did not merely cut off the hands and feet of little boys; they first of all took them in front of their mothers so that these should watch their children's dismemberment. They did not merely set fire to one of the villages near Louvain; they first of all issued an order to the people telling them that they must all be indoors by eight o'clock, and that all lights must be out at that time. Then at half-past eight they put torch to the place and roasted them all alive.

When Louvain was destroyed, hundreds of the inhabitants were driven in the direction of Aerschot. When they reached Wilsele, an attempt was made to separate the men from the women and children, but these wives and children would not leave their menfolk, so the whole lot, together with the Louvain people, to the number of about fifteen hundred, were marched back to Louvain. From there they were taken in cattle wagons to Cologne.

Now these men, women, and children were packed so tightly in the cattle trucks that they could barely move hand or foot. They were forty-eight hours there without being allowed to get out. For food, they were given one piece of

bread each, and a little water. That was all they received on the terrible journey. To make their torture more complete, the Germans told them of the cruel punishments they were to receive at the journey's end. The Germans threatened them with fiendish fancies; and—an important point is this—these people had seen their houses burned down and their fellow-villagers mutilated, and they were quite prepared to believe the Teuton soldiers' threats would be carried out.

Arrived at Cologne, they were put in a theatre building, and were all the time threatened direfully. The same day, at noon, they were taken back to Belgium in German fourth-class carriages. In each carriage they put a hundred and thirty people. There is room only ordinarily for sixty persons. Of course there were no seats. They were fifty-one hours on that train. Most of those who did not drop from fatigue stood up propped against each other all the time. For food on this return journey, they received mildewed bread, and water poured from paraffin cans, so that it tasted of the oil.

From Schaerbeek to Vilvorde, these Belgians, who had offered no resistance, were driven along on foot. Then they were dismissed and sent off towards Malines. In Sempst, however, they were again made prisoners. That night they were driven on towards Malines, the German troops behind them, and the Belgian soldiers in Malines ready to shoot. Finally the Germans retreated, and their exhausted prisoners escaped. All the

time they were prisoners they were not allowed to speak a word upon pain of death.

Not one of these wretched people but was a peaceful citizen. Not one was armed. Not one had done the slightest thing to arouse the Germans' wrath. Yet that is how they were treated. I know, because I met them in Malines, and I heard the oft-repeated story of their terrible sufferings—as if their faces alone were not enough evidence of the tortures they had endured.

On that long walk back one man fell exhausted on the road. The Germans shot him in the arm. They might have shot him through the heart or the head, but death is too merciful, too quick. So they shot him through the arm because they were not content with the man's suffering from fatigue; they wanted to ensure a little more pain for him—perhaps as a punishment for falling down. On that long journey back over thirty people went raving mad from fear and hunger. One man managed to throw himself out of the train and was killed. Three drowned themselves in the canal at Malines. And some, who spoke aloud because madness had come on them, were smashed to death with the butts of German rifles.

A drunken officer entered a convent at Diest and promptly proceeded to outrage a young nun. She screamed, and an old priest went to her assistance. He caught hold of the German and pulled him back. The soldier fell and grazed his cheek against a chair. He went at once and told his



**“Le Christ en Croix, impressive, awesome, holy, remained untouched in spite of shot and shell.”**





companions he had been attacked. So they seized the aged priest, placed him against the solid oak door of the convent, and emptied their guns at him. Then they wrecked the convent—but a strange thing happened. The oak door remained standing, and when the wounded Belgian soldier who told me of this went through the town, the oaken door, covered with bullet-holes and splashed with the blood of the old priest, stood up from out the ruins, a solitary tombstone in a graveyard of murdered folk.

When Battice was sacked, about the middle of August, Dr. Waucomont, a venerable scholar and physician who had greatly suffered from asthma for a long time, set out from there for his home in Petit Rechain, near Verviers, to fetch his two sisters. On the way he was arrested by the Germans, who accused him of being a spy. He was breathing with difficulty and his suffering was intense, but the Germans said he was only pretending. Some soldiers dragged him along and made him run, and others forced him forward by striking him on the back with the butts of their guns. When Dr. Waucomont finally fell down from exhaustion, they got a horse and put him on it and made the animal gallop along with him. Then they put their sick prisoner in a cart and carried him as far as Daelhem. They then dragged him from the cart, placed him against a wall, and were about to shoot him, when another doctor came along and succeeded in proving Dr. Waucomont's innocence. He was then released,

and went back to Petit Rechain on foot, and in a dying condition.

In St. Adelin, near Olne, the head schoolmaster was accused of having fired a shot. Neither he nor any of his family had any firearms whatever, so his innocence is beyond dispute. He and his two sons, sixteen and nineteen years old respectively, and his two daughters were shot down in front of his wife. All except one of his daughters were killed. This girl received a broken arm and a slight wound in the side of her head. She was conscious enough to lie perfectly still as though she also were dead. The other girl's lifeless body fell on her. When the Germans had gone she succeeded in getting away, and was eventually found, weak and faint from pain, by another school-teacher, who took her away to Dison, where she is now being nursed.

Upon some flimsy pretext the father, mother, and two uncles of an eight-year-old boy living at Herve were murdered. The boy's life was spared. But the German soldiers made him raise his open hands above his head, and when he did so they fired at close range at each hand, so that they fell lifeless to the poor lad's side. He is maimed for life—should he survive.

Apart from the mad atrocities of the enemy, the mere destruction of those once-peaceful cities, with their treasures of art and architecture, makes one's heart ache. The pity, the awful, irremediable pity of it! It was not enough to batter down the houses, the cathedrals, the town halls,

with their guns and shells, but they must needs in sheer wantonness burn as well as shoot. Holocaust spells holiday to the German military mind.

M. Raoul Claes, a town councillor of Louvain, told me that two weeks after the destruction of that town he had already found nine hundred and fifty charred bodies beneath the ruins. Escape for these people had been impossible. Time after time they were driven back into their burning houses. The few who did manage to struggle out were instantly shot down.

What terrible places these wrecked towns are ! The tomblike quiet of them awes one. Termonde and Hofstade and Aerschot and Malines and Louvain and a score of other places—all dead cities now, that were so alive and so beautiful a few short weeks ago ! You walk across the debris-covered streets, stumbling over shattered chimneys and fallen walls and broken coppice stones. Your feet crunch through the glass-strewn pavements—gleaming and glittering like frost-bound paths. The buildings, their front walls down, stand gaunt and blackened like the battered dolls' houses of giant children. You see the front room and the best bedroom and the little room on top, and you note the V-shaped floors, sagging down towards the bottom beneath a mass of stone and slate, and you are struck by the differences in the wall-paper. Here is the cosy intimacy of a once cheerful home, now naked to the elements.

There is a choking liminess in the air, the pungent smell of smouldering wood, and a stench

of putrefaction. You round a corner—and the swollen body of a rotting horse is stretched across the road. Buildings that had once been charming homes are now mere heaps of blackened stone. God knows how many cairns these clumsy heaps may be.

It is as if earthquake and succeeding fire had come upon the place. Here and there a building stands undamaged. The windows are broken, but that is all. You think of your Bible, and you remember—"One shall be taken, the other shall be left," and you apply it to houses, almost subconsciously and without profanity. And here and there you climb across a shifting mass of ruins till you reach a garden at the back. You see flowers growing and the greenness of uncut lawns, and now and then a mass of pretty colour—beautiful oases in a desert of blackened bricks and charred mortar.

You enter a cathedral, and the windows are mere gaping wounds in the wall. The aisles are strewn with shattered pieces of superb stained glass. The tall candles are broken and hanging at varied angles. The red prayer-mats are white with lime. The brasswork is dull and tarnished, the altar stacked with broken wood. And above, Christ on His Cross. . . . Memories of childhood's prayers come rushing to your mind, and you see the Saviour through a mist of tears.

You go, perhaps, through another street, and a flock of pigeons, silver and grey and blue, rise whirring in the air. You are startled. Vultures,



“You see the front room and the best bedroom and the little room on top.”

*Facing page 16.*



you expect ; pigeons—soft-breasted doves—— And yet they are symbolic of peace and calm and deliverance from storm. All other birds are gone. They went with the bursting of the first shell, with the thunder of the first big gun.

You speak—and unconsciously you hush your voice. It is as though you spoke in the presence of the dead.

The Germans had various methods of burning Belgian towns. At Kelfs-Herent, for instance, all the people were taken to the largest church. They were led to believe that they would be unmolested, so they remained there offering up prayers for their salvation. But while they prayed the Germans pillaged their houses and set them on fire. When the village folk came out of church, it was to enter an inferno of flame. Through the burning streets they fled, choking with smoke, to the outskirts of the town. There they were captured and taken off as prisoners. Since then no news has been heard of them. One can only think of them as lost.

And yet another preliminary to fire. August Vandenburg, a man prominent in the parish of St. Joseph in Louvain, told me that he and other men in his parish, about a hundred in all, were taken to the railway station, where they were then tied together in a mass in the form of a circle—bound so tightly that they could not move. The Germans then set fire to everything around them. The men were so placed that they could not avoid seeing everything. For fifteen hours

they remained in that position, limbs cramped, thirst unquenched, hunger unappeased. Before they were delivered they had each to pay a ransom. This was nearly impossible, as most of their houses and belongings had been destroyed in the meantime, but some of them managed to obtain a few live chickens, some obtained fruit and vegetables, and so on. They were released at seven o'clock in the morning, but were re-arrested again at noon and marched to Tirlemont, where they were forced to do all manner of work for their captors—carrying water, and wood for fires, and many more menial and disagreeable tasks.

At the village of Gelrode, near Aerschot, an old one-legged man, Théophile Calien, was forced to do scullery work for the Germans. All day long he limped about, carrying water and cleaning up, then at night, when his duties were over, his one good leg was tied tightly to his wooden one, his arms were bound behind his back, and he was thrown into a stable, where he lay until the next afternoon, when a fellow-villager managed to release him.

The Germans respect no one. They have murdered the innocent and waged war on the Church. The priests in Belgium have suffered terribly. Amongst a tired crowd of over a thousand homeless people, whose entire worldly possessions were carried in small packs wrapped up in sheets and table-covers, I encountered one man who spoke English perfectly. He was unshaven, dusty and grimy. His clothes were old and threadbare,



and they fitted him badly. His collar and tie were particularly dirty. When I found that he could speak English so well, I at once fell into conversation with him. I introduced myself and asked him to tell me his name. He wrote it in my notebook : Rev. Father Paul Van Houtte.

“ You are surprised ? ” he asked.

I told him I was ; so he explained his appearance. He and twenty other priests were captured by the Germans in Aerschot. For thirty-six hours they had neither food nor drink. Luckily for him, he had spent four years in America. He told his captors he was an American, so they released him after a while. But they first took his clerical clothes. He was forced to beg the garments he now wore. Of his fellow-priests and of five hundred other people from Aerschot, nothing has been heard. It is unlikely that anything ever will be.

Most of the priests have had to discard their clerical garb. In some parts of Belgium, the wearing of a priest's coat meant instant death. I met many priests who were doing Red Cross work. They all wore plain clothes, and very quaint some of them looked. But even a Red Cross band on one's arm is no protection.

At least fifty per cent. of the Red Cross workers at Aerschot were killed by Germans while moving wounded Belgian officers and men from the battlefield. The fact was put into formal complaint by the Belgians and forwarded to the German leaders. The German reply was that if the Red Cross people were injured it was unavoidable, as

firing was at long range. This might be believed by some persons, but I know it is a lie, for one poor lad with the Red Cross sewn on his sleeve and cap was found among the Belgian wounded with seventeen bayonet thrusts through his intestines. There is nothing of long range about that kind of murder.

In the report of the Commission appointed by the Belgian Government to inquire into breaches of the law of warfare this statement is made: "The Germans, in order to excuse their violence, declare that wherever they have shot civilians or burnt and pillaged towns and villages armed resistance has been offered by the inhabitants. While there may possibly have been isolated instances of this kind, that is nothing more than occurs in all wars, and if they had confined themselves to executing the guilty persons we could only have bowed before the rigour of the military law. But in no case could individual and absolutely exceptional acts of aggression justify the wholesale measures of repression which have been adopted against the persons and the property of the inhabitants of our towns and villages—the shooting, the burning, the pillaging which has proceeded pretty well everywhere in our country, not only by way of reprisals but with a refinement of cruelty."

In the case of Andenne, the whole town was sacked on account of one rifle shot. The report which the Belgian Commission drew up is a damning indictment of the brutal methods of warfare carried out by the Kaiser's armed men.

“The town of Andenne is situated on the right bank of the Meuse between Namur and Huy. It is connected by a bridge—blown up by the retreating Belgians—with the village of Seilles, which is built along the river on the opposite side or left bank. The main body of the German troops arrived at Andenne in the afternoon of Wednesday, August 19. The first contact between the troops and the people was quite pacific. The Germans ordered requisitions, which were duly provided. The soldiers at first paid for their purchases and for the drink which they had served to them in the cafés. Towards the evening the situation began to grow more strained. No actual friction, however, took place, and the night was calm.

“On Thursday, August 20, the new bridge over the Meuse was finished, and the troops defiled through the town in great numbers in the direction of the left bank. The inhabitants watched them passing from their houses. Suddenly, at six o'clock in the evening, a single rifle shot was heard in the street, followed immediately by a startling explosion. Presently a machine gun was set up at a corner and commenced to fire against the houses, and later a cannon dropped three shells into the town at three different points.

“Immediately afterwards, the pillage of the houses in the principal streets of the town began. Every window shutter and door was broken in. Furniture was smashed and thrown out. The soldiers ran down into the cellars and got drunk there, breaking the bottles of wine that they could

not carry away. Finally, a certain number of houses were set on fire. During the night rifle shooting broke out several times.

“Next day, Friday, August 21, at four o’clock in the morning, the soldiers spread themselves through the town, driving all the population into the streets and forcing men, women and children to march before them with their hands in the air. Those who did not obey with sufficient promptitude, or did not understand the order given them in German, were promptly knocked down. Those who tried to run away were shot. It was at this moment that Dr. Camus, the Burgomaster, against whom the Germans seemed to have some special spite, was wounded by a rifle shot, and then killed by a blow from an axe. His body was dragged along by the feet for some distance.

“A watchmaker, a Fleming by birth, who had lived for some time in the town, was coming out of his house on the order of the soldiers, supporting on his arm his father-in-law, an old man of eighty. Naturally, therefore, he could not hold up both hands. A soldier stepped up to him and struck him with an axe on the neck. He fell mortally wounded before his own door. His wife tried to bring him assistance, was pushed back into the house, and had to assist helplessly at the last agony of her husband. A soldier threatened to shoot her with his revolver if she crossed the door-sill.

“Meanwhile, the whole population was being driven towards the Place des Tilleuls. Old men,



Malines. "You walk across the debris-covered streets."



the sick, and the paralysed, were all brought there. Some were drawn on wheel-chairs, others pushed on hand-carts, others again borne up by their relations. The men were separated from the women and children, then all were searched, but no arms were found on them. One man had in his pocket some empty cartridge cases, both German and Belgian. He was immediately arrested. So was a cobbler who had a wounded hand ; the wound was a month old. An engineer was also arrested because he had in his pocket a spanner, which was considered as a weapon. Another man seems to have been arrested because his face showed his contempt and rage at what was going on. These people were shot in the presence of the crowd, and all died bravely.

“Subsequently, the soldiers, on the order of their officers, picked out of the mass some forty or fifty men, who were led off and all shot, some along the bank of the Meuse and others in front of the police station. While this scene was going on in the Place des Tilleuls, other soldiers spread themselves through the town, continuing their work of sack, pillage and arson.

“Eight men, belonging to the same household, were led out in a meadow fifty yards from their dwelling. Some of them were shot and the rest cut down with blows of an axe. A young boy and woman were shot.

“About ten in the morning the officers told the women to withdraw, giving them the order to gather together the dead bodies and to wash away

the stains of blood which defiled the street and the houses. About midday the surviving men, to the number of 800, were shut up as hostages in three little houses near the bridge, but they were not allowed to go out of them on any pretext, and were so crammed together that they could not even sit down on the floor. These hostages were not finally released until the Tuesday following.

“The statistics of the losses at Andenne give the following total:—Three hundred were massacred in Andenne and Scilles, and about 300 houses were burnt in the two localities. A great number of inhabitants have fled. Almost every house has been sacked; indeed, the pillage did not end for eight days. Other places have suffered more than Andenne, but no other Belgian town was the theatre of so many scenes of ferocity and cruelty.

“The numerous inhabitants whom we have cross-examined are unanimous in asserting that the German troops were not fired upon. Many of them think that Andenne was sacrificed merely to establish a reign of terror, and quote words uttered by officers which seem to them to show that the destruction of the place was premeditated.”

There is one instance of German barbarity so awful that I find myself pausing for a minute before I can think of words to write of it. In a magazine article that I wrote I mentioned the fact, and I was overwhelmed with letters from



every part of the country, as well as from Denmark and Holland and other neutral countries. Psychologists wrote to me on the matter. Prominent social and women's movement workers consulted me about it. Many letters corroborated what I said. Only one doubted the statement. This letter was written from the opulence and ease of a West End club. I knew from its notepaper what it contained. It was the same stationery on which protests are written as to "Under what act was So-and-so, the spy, shot?" and "Why are poor innocent Germans in England put in concentration camps?"

Some German infantrymen came across a young married woman who was pregnant. She was the wife of a gardener, whom they killed. The time of childbirth was not many days off. They cut her body open that they might see her unborn child. It was a boy.

"That's one soldier less to fight in twenty years time," one of the devils exclaimed.

This story is true. If I could take aside the individual readers of this book, one by one, I could convince them of the truth of this fearful atrocity. I could tell them many things that I cannot write here, but I have consulted the publishers of this book on the matter, and have put before them such evidence that they agree to its publication.

Hell and its most hardened inhabitants on a drunken holiday could not conceive such cruelties

as the mad soldiers of the mad monarch have had charged against them, irrevocably, on the sullied pages of this war's history.

And all these were found in the wake of the war. . . .

## CHAPTER III

### ANTWERP

**I**N the Avenue de Keyser, in Antwerp, there is a fine hotel called after the name of its proprietor, one Weber, a native of the Fatherland. It stands at the corner of the Avenue des Arts, whose magnificent flower-beds in the centre make it one of the most beautiful thoroughfares in the city. If you have been in Antwerp, you must know Weber's Hotel. Probably you have spent a night in it.

To this hotel, at the beginning of the war, an angry crowd went. A tremendous hatred of Germans and things German had sprung into the hearts of the Anversois. The people felt that they had been betrayed. Antwerp was a stronghold of Germans in Belgium. These Germans had made money in the town. Many of them occupied high positions of importance in the civic life of the people; many of them were officers in the Garde Civique; some of them held rank in Belgian corps. And now, with the first cry of "War," many of these Germans had disappeared, taking with them knowledge of fortifications and military plans and tactics that were eventually to prove so valuable to the foe.

Feeling ran high. The owner of a Teutonic face

had but to show it to run the danger of having it struck. To speak aloud, if one were German, was, to say the least, unwise. Persons of German names adopted those of other nations. German signboards simply stamped their shops with the hell-mark of disapproval. The Belgian owner of an hotel in the Avenue de Keyser, two blocks nearer the Central Station than the Weber, which took its name from the German brewery called Pschorr, hastily took down the tabooed word from the corner of the building, so that his establishment was named simply "Hotel," and so remained. True, his forks and spoons remained "Pschorr Hotel" as before, but the food in his restaurant was excellent, and, anyway, it was the other end of the instruments that one put in one's mouth, so he was forgiven and his place was spared.

Now, when the news of war came to Antwerp, the crowd thought to themselves, "Very well. The Germans have attacked us, so we'll attack them." The only Germans at hand were, of course, residents of the town, so on them the crowd waged war. They started on the Germans nearest their own homes, so it came about that they wrecked all the little German cafés and saloon-bars in the dirty, narrow slum streets around the docks, many of them cesspools of iniquity that ought to have been wrecked long ago in any case. They threw stones through every window and plate-glass sign. They set some places on fire. They entered upstairs rooms and threw out the chairs on

which many of them had sat the week before, and tables and ornaments, and even the cheap German pianos whose tinkling notes had been the source of mingled pleasure and disturbance in the neighbourhood. Then the crowd aspired to bigger game, so off they went in force to the Avenue de Keyser, singing their "Brabançonne." This was in the days before "Tipperary" had come into its own.

Outside their goal, they found their progress barred by gendarmes. Inside the hotel was Herr Weber, a stout, elderly German who had started in the town as a waiter and had risen to be a millionaire, and who really ought to have returned to his native land to take up arms against his customers. Now Mr. Weber heard the murmur of the crowd and he shivered with a sudden fear. But a brilliant idea came into his mind. He would show the people that he was one of them. All he had to do, thought he, was to hang out a Belgian flag. So off he rushed to where his flags were kept, procured one and ran with it on to the balcony on the first floor. Then he proudly and bravely waved the colours.

But a dreadful thing happened. In his haste Herr Weber had picked out the wrong flag, so there he stood, before an angry mob, holding aloft the hated black-white-red of the Fatherland !

Reinforcements came along, and it took five hundred strong men to hold the infuriated crowd at bay. Then Weber disappeared, and the police who went to arrest him could not find where he

had gone. Finally, after a long and fruitless search, a brainy gendarme hit on a likely scheme. So he got sulphur and set it on fire so that the fumes filled the cellar of the hotel. Coughing that could not be suppressed followed, and eventually a pale-faced elderly German crawled out from his wine bins and came forth sheepishly like a grown-up lamb to the slaughter. He was afterwards released. I believe he had two sons in the Belgian army. But another thing happened.

It had been a long and tiring man-hunt. It was warm, and the civil guard, no doubt, were dry. The cellars were well stocked. The wines were various and of excellent vintage. An officer told the men they could help themselves.

But not a man would touch a drop.

"What!" they cried. "Drink German goods! No damn fear!" or Belgian words to that effect.

Feeling, as you can see, ran high.

Weber's Hotel, by the way, became the quarters of the Gendarmerie and the Red Cross Ambulance. And I might mention now that the German Seamen's Home, which lay down near the river, flew the Red Cross flag when I last saw it, and the *Gneisenau*, a huge North German Lloyd boat, was fitted up as a hospital ship for wounded Belgian soldiers, and remained as such until the last dreadful days before the Germans came into the occupation of Antwerp, when it went down into the muddy waters of the Scheldt, sunk by the Belgian troops before they left the town.

When I arrived in Antwerp, the first days of

feverish excitement had passed and the city had returned to a state of comparative calm. Not even the arrival of the Government from Brussels upset this. But when the Queen took her children away to England, the people were a little uneasy, although the feeling of unrest passed when the Queen again returned, even although she came alone. I drove from the docks to my hotel behind a very old driver and a very old horse. All the really useful cab horses had been commandeered by the military authorities, just as every motor-car had been. These latter, by the way, were all labelled "Service Militaire," with their particular numbers beneath. Every driver—nearly every man, indeed—was in uniform. If one entered a shop by day one would be served by a woman. In the evening, however, the shopkeeper would probably return from duty in time to relieve his wife for an hour or so. Then you would find him behind his counter in full military attire, hat as well, while you would probably notice his rifle standing in a corner behind him.

Every woman seemed to be knitting. I never saw so many socks in so many stages of completion before. Soap, as you know, is self-supplied in Belgian and French hotels. I had forgotten this when I packed my bag, so I went into a big store in the Avenue de Keyser to buy a tablet. The girl who served me was knitting socks. So was the girl in the cash-desk. So were all the other shop assistants. I went to buy some cigars. The woman had to lay down her unfinished sock to

serve me. She was knitting again by the time I had lit up and was leaving the shop. Madame on her throne behind the gaudy counter of the little café where I had dinner was knitting at a tremendous rate, fearful lest the war should be over before her socks were ready. And so in all the other shops. Young girls, with deft white fingers, made socks that were a mixture of grey wool and lilac dreams. Young women stood by counters and crowded stalls with needles clicking merrily. Elder women, with roughened fingers, worked almost mechanically but surely with the soft worsted.

One would look at the knitters interrogatively. "Pour les soldats, monsieur," they would answer, and there was pride in their voices. Every woman had some man in his country's service.

In the streets one found that Belgian flags hung from every building. Belgian colours were in every buttonhole and were the favourite trimming for ladies' hats. Little red-white-and-blue rosettes were also in favour, and the wearing of tiny Union Jacks was a matter of special pride.

All day long the streets were thronged with people. In the evening the cafés were crowded. It was difficult to secure a seat at one of the little marble-topped tables that stood on the pavements outside the café doors. Excited soldiers would sit there with their women folks, drinking bock and smoking big cigars, and tell about the latest news they had heard. Some of them who had



actually been to the front were the special centres of interest. Later on, after the Zeppelins had come and when the enemy were not so far away, and when the lights went out at eight o'clock, you would see wounded men sitting at the café tables, their hands and arms white-banded, telling all about how it had happened, in quick phrases so that the full news could be told in time to let them get off home before darkness came upon the town with the stroke of eight.

The realization of war did not come with the presence of the soldiers. Martial law, even, meant nothing to me. The flags might have signified a fête or public holiday—the knitting of the socks might have been a perennial native industry. The few bandaged soldiers at the little tables were of no great significance; even civilians' hands are cut at times. But when the fighting area spread nearer to the town and when the Red Cross trains came rumbling in, one knew . . .

At first they came at night or in the late evening. Weeks later they came in all day long. Down in the Rue du Pelican, along by the side of the Central Station, Red Cross tramway-cars would glide up and form a waiting row. Ambulance motor-cars would snort their way through the big side gates of the station, and heavy horse-drawn wagons would rattle up to the doors, then through them out of sight. Great anxious crowds would gather to see the cars and carts come out. When the great doors opened to let the laden vehicles pass, the crowd would surge

forward in a mass to try to get a glimpse of their occupants. The men for the waiting tramcars were brought out on stretchers. Each face of the wounded men the crowd would scan, hearts a-tremble lest the white face of a "soldat blessé" should be that of a husband or a brother or a much-loved son.

For the reception of wounded soldiers there were 50,000 beds in Antwerp. Schools had been transformed into hospitals, club-rooms to wards, and many private mansions had been fitted up to house the injured men. And there were hundreds of willing helpers. Priests and nuns and sisters of mercy were in attendance in many places. One hospital—it had been an Orphan Home, in the Rue Durlot—was run entirely by society ladies, simply dressed in white, and so gentle and charming and sympathetic that being wounded was not altogether a terrible thing. Of these hospitals I shall write later.

Now, there is one other point that impressed me in Antwerp during these earliest weeks of the war. The authorities were suspicious of every stranger. They were doubly suspicious of any man with a camera. I, a stranger, with a kodak, was both. They were trebly suspicious of me. In fact, on the day of my arrival in the town I was arrested by a gendarme and locked up on the charge of being a German spy. The only consolation I had was that the gendarme decided that it was necessary to have two men with rifles and fixed bayonets and well-filled cartridge cases to

1<sup>er</sup> Lämmerstein  
für Herrn Fraulein Portogre, Frankfurt am Personen

aus Brüssel den 31. 5. 1890

Staatsangehörig nach Belgien

zur Reise von Brüssel nach Halle und zurück, über Leipzig und Berlin

mit Wagen und Wagen Eintritt zum Brüssel Schiff der zu Fuss  
zweck zum Brüssel Schiff der zu Fuss

Gültig bis zum 31. 12. 1911 vorbehaltlich jederzeitigen Widerrufs.

Valable jusqu'au 31. 12. 1911 révoable en tout temps).

Die Deutschen Grenzer dürfen die Pferde und Geschütze sowie den Wagen  
nicht requirieren. Der Wagen darf unberührt werden.  
(Le véhicule et les chevaux ne peuvent être réquisitionnés par les troupes  
allemandes. - Le véhicule peut être visité.)

Leut. Portogre:  
F. Echevin,  
Maurice Lammert



Brüssel, den 16 November 1911.

Der Kommandant von Brüssel,  
A. B.

Regu 10 erhalten.  
für

Oberleutnant.

Vermerk: Sobald das Operations- oder Etappengebiet einer deutschen Armee  
berührt wird, hängt die Genehmigung zur Fortsetzung der Reise lediglich  
von dem Ermessen der vorliegenden militärischen Dienststellen ab.  
Remarque: Il est bien entendu que le voyage ne pourra se poursuivre que pour  
autant que les opérations d'une armée allemande dans la contrée auto-  
risée le permettent).

A German passport issued at Brussels.



guard me, who had no weapons other than a fountain pen and a small camera.

I had expected a friend to arrive from Ostend by way of Ghent. About two o'clock in the afternoon I arrived at the Pays de Waes station, at which the ferry boat that conveys the passengers from the train at the other side of the river arrives. The gates were shut, so I remained outside. I could see the boat across the Scheldt, and after waiting fully an hour, during most of which I stood peering through the iron railings, it was still there, and there were no signs of a train's arrival or of the boat's subsequent departure.

I had smoked two cigars and was lighting my pipe when a hand gripped my shoulder, and I turned round and found myself face to face with a very fierce-moustached gendarme. He said something or other to me in Flemish, so I replied in French and said "Anglais," which, I thought, was sufficient. By this time, which was only a matter of seconds, a crowd had gathered, so the gendarme jerked his head towards the station building. To make sure that I understood that he wanted me to go there with him, he gripped my arm tightly with his free hand—the other held a rifle—and pushed me along in front of him.

Once into the booking-office, which was thronged with other gendarmes, I produced my passport and opened it for my captor to read. He glanced over it, looked at both sides, and commenced to read from the beginning: "We, Sir Edward Grey, a Baronet of the United Kingdom of Great

Britain and Ireland, Knight of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, a Member of His Britannic Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council, a Member of Parliament, etc., etc., etc. . . .," and so on, and could make nothing of it, which was not surprising.

Meanwhile, I was saying "Anglais" and "Ami," and even as much as "Je suis Anglais," and was afraid to say "Oui" to anything he said lest he should be asking me if I was something that I was not. He gave me back my passport and put me in a little room in a building at the back and allowed me the company of two of his companions, who looked dreadfully serious and important, and would have shot me, I am sure, on the slightest provocation.

Some hours later an officer came to see me. He spoke English, gave me a cigar, told me the crowd outside might have mobbed me if I had not been shut up, said it was the best thing that could have happened for my safety, and generally made me feel that I owed the fierce-moustached gendarme a debt of gratitude. He also crossed the road with me to a café and bought me a glass of bock.

He and his wife had dinner with me that night, and two days later I had lunch at his house, after which I played for an hour with his two children, who were exceedingly amused at the queer-sounding things I said to them. They put me down as a great humorist.

Every stranger, my officer friend said, was a

spy in the eyes of the police. He also said this, which, as I found, was the general opinion, "Even the good German is a bad German." He had a large English vocabulary. Much of it he had gathered from seafaring men. That remark about Germans is not the exact phrase he used, but it will have to do.

I was anxious to go out to the firing line. Two things were necessary—a military pass giving me permission to go in and out of the town, and a conveyance. The second was not so important as the first, without which I could not leave the town, or, at any rate, if I did manage to get out, I would find it difficult to get in again. Trains still ran a certain distance towards the scene of action, but not near enough to prevent a long walk if I had no vehicle in which to travel.

With the aid of important letters of introduction, I had no difficulty in obtaining a "Laissez passer" from the Commandant of the "Position Fortifiée d'Anvers" at the Etat-Major in the Rampart Kipdorp. On this I had to paste a photograph of myself, on which the authorities put their stamp. The portrait was a libellous affair that I had had made for a franc, but it was sufficient to meet the military requirements.

My pass secured, and there being no suitable trains and I not having a motor-car (if I had had one it would have been useless, for all petrol had been commandeered for military purposes), I set out on a tramway-car to the outskirts of Antwerp, thence on foot towards Malines and the south.

Outside Antwerp, I found the Belgians preparing for the possible advent of the enemy. Hundreds and hundreds of houses were being razed to the ground at Vieux-Dieu and Mortsel, and trees were being cut down so that the big guns of the forts could have free play. Barbed wire was being stretched across fields, and all manner of pits were being dug to prevent cavalry from advancing. Mines were also being placed in the roads and in the fields.

In connection with the clearing for action in the neighbourhood of Antwerp, there is one case I must mention. Outside Vieux-Dieu, on the way to Contich, was the former country seat of an old Belgian family, which had, however, been purchased two years before by a very wealthy German named Von Mallincrodt.<sup>1</sup> When the military engineers started to lay bare the districts in the proximity of the Vieux-Dieu and Mortsel Forts, they were compelled to cut down some very tall trees which bordered Von Mallincrodt's estate and which were his property.

At this time the Military Order had not yet been given to compel all Germans and Austrians to leave Antwerp. Von Mallincrodt protested against the destruction of his trees, and went so far as to express his feelings against the Belgian authorities in somewhat abusive phrases. But the Commander of the Position Fortifiée d'Anvers cut short the abusive protestations of Herr Von

<sup>1</sup> Actually burgomaster of Cappellen under the German domination.





A street in Willebroeck, near Antwerp, with barbed wire entanglements,



Mallincrodt, reserve officer of Germany, in whose house were found later the full uniform of an officer of the German Guard, and many compromising papers. The military command of expulsion was issued, and within a very few hours' time the country seat was razed to the ground, together with all the property belonging to it.

I was marching on past Von Mallincrodt's big gilt-topped iron gates, which stood up strangely amongst the fallen stones and cut trees, when I heard a motor-car come up behind me. It was a large open car, and there was no one in it but the driver. He was the cheeriest, kindest-hearted looking man I have ever seen. He slowed up as he came towards me, and I think he must have seen the pleading look in my face. He stopped his car.

"Going to Malines?" he said in English.

"Yes," said I.

"Would you care to ride?"

I told him I was unable to thank him enough. I also said, when we were on our way, that I was an English journalist, and that it was absolutely essential for me to get on to the battlefield and see something.

"You'll see more than you'll ever be able to write about," he told me. "You'll see some things that you'll not be able to write about at all. And other things—how do you say it?—you will write in tears, n'est-ce pas?"

I ought to have told you that he was flying the Red Cross flag at the side of his car.

## CHAPTER IV

### SCHIJPLAECEN

AT the commencement of the war, the Belgian Red Cross authorities commandeered for their town and field service a number of motor-cars. The bodies of some of these cars were removed and new upper parts were fixed on with special fittings made to receive four or six stretchers. Other cars, with good and serviceable seating accommodation, were left as they were.

Now Captain Albert de Keersmaecker, my new-found friend, was, in his own words, "rather above the age of enlisting." But he had a fine 60 h.p. Minerva open car, and he was an experienced and skilful driver, so off to the Croix Rouge he went and volunteered at once for Red Cross field service. Now, in the following two weeks, when the Germans were attacking Liège, Captain de Keersmaecker was busy in Antwerp helping to fit up new hospitals and operating-rooms, going in his car for all kinds of medicines and drugs and bandages, and so on, and therefore it was not until the twentieth of August that he began to do the field work for which he had offered his services.

On that day he went with some medical commissioners to the fort of Kessel, outside Lierre, where they were bringing military and Red Cross

doctors from the military and private hospitals. On the way back to Antwerp, they met for the first time since war broke out several wounded soldiers coming back from the front. These Albert de Keersmaecker took in his car to the hospital of the "Comptoir Commercial." Thus he had the honour of bringing the first wounded soldiers to Antwerp.

The next few days were passed without anything exciting happening. The Germans at this time were nearing Brussels, and were burning down all the villages through which they passed—Dinant, Diest, Waremmé, Landen—with the exception of Haelen, where the Belgian cavalymen inflicted such tremendous losses on the Germans that their entire advance was checked for a time, but only temporarily. Haelen, as a matter of fact, was burned down later on by the advancing Germans. About this time, Albert—he was just Albert to me before many days had passed—was sent to Heyst-op-den-Berg with two doctors. When they came to the crossing of the Aerschot road and the one that led to Putte and Malines, they were stopped by a small party of Belgian Lancers, headed by a dashing young lieutenant. He made them stop, and notwithstanding the official label on the car made them show their papers. When he ascertained who Albert and the doctors were, he apologised for having stopped them, but explained that it was really necessary on account of the number of German spies who were about. He then said that he was Lieutenant

Sybil, and that he was the only officer left of all those who had taken part in the charge of Haelen.

The retreat of the Belgian lancers at Haelen had resulted in very heavy losses. The German machine guns were firing on them at such a close range that Lieutenant Sybil and some of his men actually passed not more than fifty yards in front of the muzzles of the guns, from which a steady flow of lead was pouring at a tremendous rate. Although very much outnumbered, the Belgian soldiers had managed to hold back the Germans so long because they were all dismounted and were firing from behind whatever little shelter they could secure. When the time came for their retreat, they had to run to catch their horses, many of whom had become restive and had run off, and in that race across the open many men fell. Lieutenant Sybil's commander fell next to him, with a bullet through his throat and one in his chest. He died at once and had to be left behind in that terrible retreat.

In Heyst-op-den-Berg, Albert for the first time took charge of a wounded German cavalryman from the 28th Mecklenburg Corps and took him back, a prisoner, to Antwerp. The Germans had been in Heyst-op-den-Berg the previous day, but had not done any damage. That same morning they had retreated towards Aerschot, which was then occupied by them for the first time. Every one had fled from Heyst, and on their return they found that the village of Koninckshoeck had been nearly deserted by its population.

The wounded German was groaning with pain all this time. He had received a bullet in the knee-cap of his left leg. When the motor-car passed in sight of the peasants in the little villages on the return journey to Antwerp, and when the grey of the German's uniform was seen, loud groans and curses and angry threats came from all sides. That night the prisoner was taken to the Hospital Militaire in the Avenue Marie, to which hospital many other Belgian and German soldiers were in the course of the next few weeks to be taken. We had our share in their transport.

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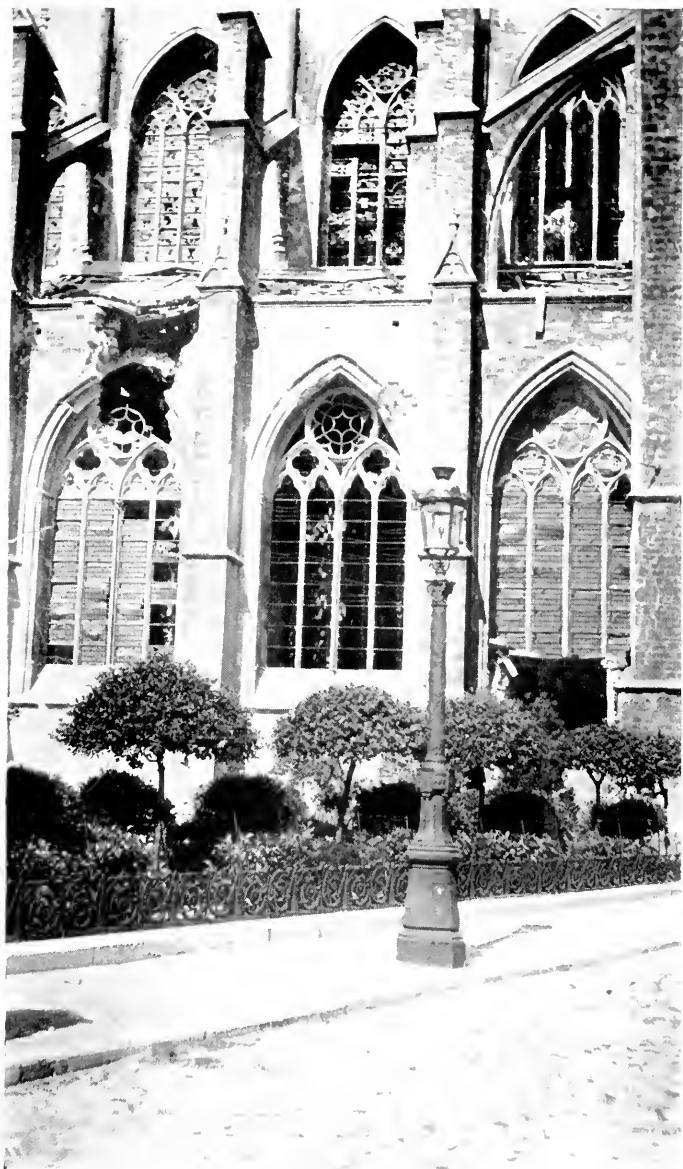
The bombardment of Malines had been renewed, as we discovered on arriving in the town. The Germans were in force somewhere to the south. Their headquarters were at Campenhout, and their big guns placed at Hofstade were pouring shells into helpless Malines. Many private houses had been wrecked: some had been fired by the shells and were still smouldering when we passed them. The old Museum, where the archives of the town were kept, was badly damaged. The beautiful Cathedral of St. Rombold, one of the largest and finest churches in Belgium, had huge holes in its southern side. Its fine stained-glass windows had been reduced to atoms and its whole interior was shattered and wrecked. The great square tower of the church had whitened bruises on its grey sides where the German shells had struck. The iron railings that enclosed the little lawn on the south were broken; the lawn itself was littered

with scattered pieces of stone and brick and glass, and the overhead electric tramway wires had fallen in the street that ran along the west side of the church.

The people of the town were terror-stricken. Not even waiting to gather their portable valuables together, they were rushing away in the direction of Antwerp, out of the reach of the terrible havoc-dealing German guns. But not all of them went on to Antwerp. Little groups lingered by the roadside at the northern side of the river Dyle, waiting there in the hopes of the bombardment ceasing, so that they could then return to the homes they had so hurriedly left. The shells from Fort Waelhem whistled over their heads on their journey to the German lines, and now, looking back across all the subsequent events of the Germans' advance, there is something intensely pathetic in the simple trust of these townsfolk, although at that time we were all optimistic and heard each Belgian shell pass with a smile and a joking remark.

We stayed in Malines all day, helping to transport wounded men and cripples from the several different hospitals in the town to a place of safety. We had given all the help we could, so by eight o'clock at night we decided that we might as well return to Antwerp as we could not render any further assistance that day. We had stopped our car in the Grand Place opposite a little café, whose proprietor with his wife and two sons still remained in the town. We each had a cup





“ St. Rombold's Cathedral at Malines had huge holes in its southern side.”

*Facing page 44-*



of coffee, and were about to start the car for the homeward run when two women came running up to us from the south of the square in a state of great excitement. Somehow or other they had learned that the Germans had a number of Belgian wounded shut up in a barn in Schiplaeken, a small village on the way to Louvain. They asked us, who were flying the Red Cross flag, if we would go and bring them away.

The Belgian troops were to the north of Malines. Their outmost sentry was on the north side of the bridge across the Dyle, so it was extremely dangerous to go anywhere on the road that lay to the south of the town in the direction of Louvain. There was no help to be got from the Belgian soldiers, either as to finding out the exact position of the enemy or as to receiving assistance if attacked. However, we discussed the matter, and finally determined to run the gauntlet of the German outposts and try to reach the wounded men. An ambulancier, who knew the way perfectly, offered to accompany us as a guide, so we left Malines about nine o'clock, with lights out, and running as smoothly and quietly as the road and the car allowed.

It was a beautiful starry night, but very dark. We managed to steer the car by the line of sky between the tall trees that bordered either side of the road. We did not speak a dozen words during the whole of the run. There was something quite uncanny about our drive in the dark. Any minute we might have run into a body of

Germans ; any minute there might have come a challenge from the wayside or a spurt of red flame and a whizzing bullet. After three-quarters of an hour's run we came to a narrow lane, about half-way between Malines and Louvain, on both sides of which were high, thick bushes that ran down to the edge of the canal. From this lane we could easily see the German camp fires that lay about half a mile in front of us, to left and right, on the other side of the canal.

Albert ran his car into the shelter of the bushes, where we left it, and then crept quietly down to the edge of the water. Here, luckily, we discovered that the Germans had neglected to take to their side of the water the smaller of the two pontoons used for transporting persons and light cars from one side of the canal to the other. In order to pull the pontoon across the water, there was a chain running through iron blocks fixed on either end of the boat. Owing to the perfect stillness of the night we had to be extremely cautious lest we should make the slightest noise, so we fastened our handkerchiefs around and through the iron blocks, and thus managed to cross with no noise whatever beyond the gentle lapping of the water. From both sides of the canal came the sharp ticking chirp of the crickets.

At the other side we fastened the pontoon to the bullrushes on the bank, and then on hands and knees proceeded softly to follow the road that led to the village. We were obliged to do this because the first part of the opposite road ran

along the dyke above the canal and was in full view of anyone who happened to be in the flat fields, because, dark as the night was, our silhouettes could easily have been seen. After a few yards, fifty or so, we came down the road to where it was on the level of the fields, so we were able to give up our crawl for a crouching position. We had gone along the unpaved, sandy edge of the road for another fifty yards, when of a sudden we heard the sharp bark of a farmer's dog—a bark that rose crescendo out of the darkness ahead.

So this was the end of all things. The barking of a dog—discovery—capture—and death. We had no doubts as to our fate if we were made prisoners. We knew how other Red Cross men had fared on falling into the Germans' hands. And we knew of how, at Aerschot, for instance, the young son of the tax-collector of the town and many others had been shot while attending to the wounded in the fields. Besides all which, we were creeping into the enemy's camp at night, with no excuse whatever except the fatal truth that we were trying to rescue wounded prisoners, and as far as I myself was concerned, I had not even a Red Cross badge on my arm—and, most damning fact of all, I was a British subject, which is the worst crime in the eyes of the Germans.

The barking died down. There were a few staccato yaps, then silence again. Each of us could hear his own heart beat. The ambulancier told me afterwards that all he could think was :

“What a fool I was to come here!” Albert told me he had wished he had a good revolver in place of a Red Cross badge. For myself, the journalistic instinct was strong and I thought that if we got back to Antwerp quite safe it would be a good story for me; and if we didn’t, it would be a good story for some one else. I even considered at the time if my relatives would send my photograph to the London weeklies, and I found myself hoping that they would send the one that stood on the top of the piano in the drawing-room at home.

After a few minutes, we proceeded on our way, half-bent, along the edge of the road. On either side we could see the bivouac fires of the enemy, and even near to the road the curious straw huts made to shelter the German infantry-men at night. These huts are made with sheaves of wheat or corn, in the shape of an inverted “V.” One side is left open, and in these shelters the men sleep: two or three men in each one.

The ambulancier, who was acting as a guide, stopped at last to warn us just before we came to two farm cottages. The doors of each were gaping open and above them were hanging white flags. We stumbled against the bodies of three soldiers. At first we had a quick fear that they were sleeping Germans, but on no sound coming from them, we felt for any signs of life and found that they were dead. They were all Belgians. Just past these cottages there was a little outhouse with the door open. As we passed it we heard a rustling

in the straw and somewhat wheezy breathing. This, if possible, was even more terrifying to us than the bodies we had stumbled over. For a moment we stopped. Nothing happened. No guttural challenge came from within. But there was more heavy breathing, like that of a giant. Albert went into the shed and found—a stray calf!

The barn we sought was near at hand. It formed one side of a square; a large iron gate in front and the church and the village school opposite one another forming the other three sides. The big gate was open, so we crept quietly through and crossed the square in the shelter of the school wall, having to pick our way past broken wheelbarrows and rifles, blankets and all manner of litter, and dead bodies, until we reached the barn door.

We pushed the door open gently, crept in on tip-toes and listened. There were only the sounds of muffled groans and deep breathing. We flashed a pocket electric lamp on the floor for a second. It was enough to show us from twenty to thirty Belgian soldiers lying on the straw-covered floor in all positions, with heads, arms, or legs bandaged. In a whisper Albert told the men who were awake that we were Belgians and that we were going to try to save them if possible. He told them to waken the sleeping men as noiselessly as they could, and to get all those who were able to walk to prepare to leave the barn at once. At first not a single man answered. They told us later that when the door had opened they had been

afraid that we were Germans coming to kill them.

We passed amongst the men. Some of them were terribly wounded. One man had his head bandaged with a strap to hold his broken jaws up. His head had swollen to an enormous size. He was unable either to speak or to hear us, so we had to leave him behind. Some of the men, whose wounds had been unattended, were already dead. A sickly smell added to the horrors of the place and circumstances.

Finally we managed to get seven men on their legs. We cautioned them about the danger of their surroundings and impressed upon them the necessity for absolute noiselessness, then out we all went, over the littered square and through the iron gate in front. Some of the worst cases we half carried.

Now, near the square there was a private drive that led up to the country seat of the Baron Terlinden. The house was not two hundred yards from where the ten of us stood, and we were able to see distinctly a number of German officers indulging in a drunken revel. The house was ablaze with lights: every room was lit up and blindless. One man threw an empty bottle through the glass of the window. We heard the crash and the drunken singing and laughter that followed. The Germans were yelling and behaving like madmen. Even the sentries around the house were lying on the ground senseless as the result of much drink. Albert crept near enough to the house to see this. He told me afterwards that



if we had not had seven wounded men with us, he would have torn the Red Cross band from his arm and gone after the drunken Germans with a stick. This, he declared, would have been sufficiently strong a weapon with which to tackle the revellers.

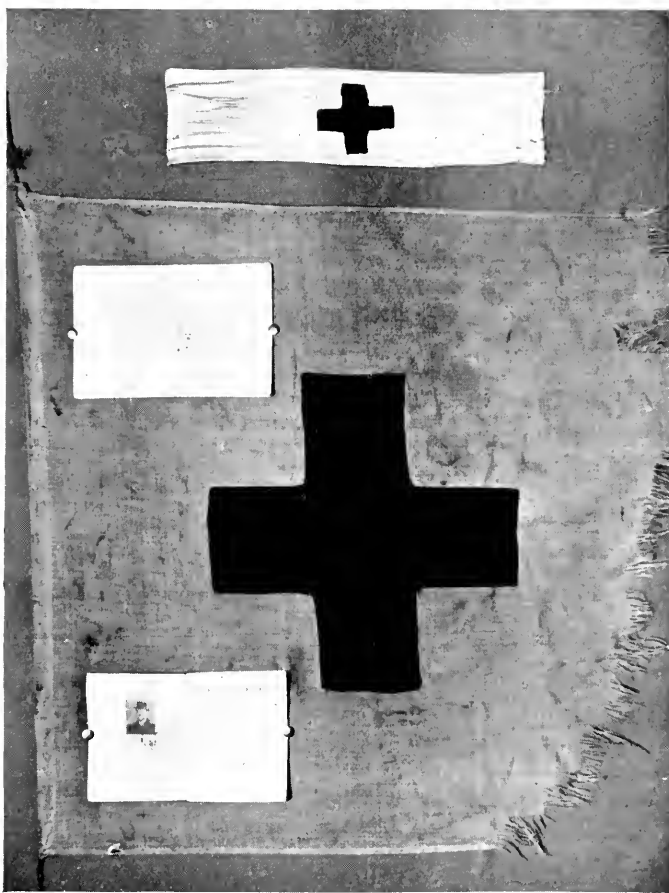
The Germans' drunken state proved our salvation. We proceeded past the farm buildings and along the road to the canal without any mishap. The only thing that worried us was the barking of another dog—perhaps it was the same one. It took fully an hour to get the wounded men down to the pontoon and across to the other side. In ordinary circumstances the average man could walk the distance in twenty minutes. Every one of us was absolutely exhausted. We three uninjured men had practically carried three of the soldiers all the way. We got the men placed in the car as best we could. Two of them we had to lash to the luggage-carrier at the back of the car. I rode on the splashboard at the side. Then off to Malines—not very quickly owing to the weight we had in the car and the fear we had for the tyres.

When we were crossing the railway just before entering the town, we saw on our left and heard the clatter of a considerable party of horsemen. These, it turned out, were Germans, for when we mentioned their presence to the Belgian sentry on the other side of the town, he informed us that a big number of Uhlans had been reported and that they were circling round Malines,

We reached Antwerp about half-past three in the morning, having managed to rescue seven soldiers from the enemy. These poor men had had no attention whatever for four days. For three days the Germans had not even given them food. They had had absolutely nothing to eat in that time. Yet, weak and wounded as they were, four of them had walked unaided from the barn to the canal pontoon without so much as a single groan or complaint. We took them to the hospital in the Rue Durlet, where their wounds were attended to at once. We then discovered that one man had had both his legs pierced by bullets—one leg having a great wound in it where the bullet had passed out. This was beyond all shadow of a doubt clear proof that the Germans had been firing “clipped” bullets. These, indeed, had the same effect as the real dum-dum lead bullet, if not actually worse.

One very tall man, a Walloon from Liège, was an extraordinary case. A German sharp-pointed bullet had entered at a sharp angle in his left shoulder and had lodged itself not half an inch from his heart, as was shown by the X-rays. I happen to know that the man was not operated upon, and that he recovered from his wound and went back to the battle-line, the bullet still remaining close to his heart.

Next day General Warnant sent ten Red Cross ambulances (motor-cars and wagons) to Schip-laeken, and the Germans made the whole staff of doctors and ambulanciers prisoners of war,



Captain de Keersmaecker's armlet and flag on which are shown pages from his official Red Cross book of orders.



Now coincidences are very strange. I had no sooner finished writing about our adventure in Schiplaeken than I came across a copy of the *XXme Siècle* in which appeared an article dealing with the Baron Terlinden and his château. This article contained many details that proved conclusively that the pillage of Belgian houses and towns was not simply the doing of individual German soldiers, but was the result of a systematical organisation established under the orders of Marshal Von der Goltz-Pasha himself, the temporary Governor of Belgium.

During their march to Malines, an undefended town, the Prussian soldiers pillaged all the country houses and villas on the way, before setting fire to them. Amongst the many châteaux they passed, said the *XXme Siècle*, was the old property of Schiplaeken belonging to the Baron Terlinden, Procureur Général of the Cour de Cassation of Brussels—the Highest Court of Justice in Belgium. As soon as it was possible for him to go to Schiplaeken, where he had many family relics and souvenirs which were very dear to him, as well as numerous objects of art, the Baron Terlinden went there. He found that the German soldiers who had passed through his estate had taken away everything of value that they found. Baron Terlinden made inquiries in the village of Schiplaeken before leaving as to the number of German soldiers who had been there, as to the particular regiments, and as to the names of the officers in charge. Then when he had obtained all the

information he went back to Brussels, called on the Marshal Von der Goltz and complained to him about the pillage of his château.

At first Von der Goltz protested against the Baron's statements, and said that any robbing that had taken place was not done by the Kaiser's soldiers but by the Belgians themselves. He changed his attitude, however, when the Baron Terlinden told him not only the numbers of the particular regiments concerned, but also the names of the officers who commanded them.

"If this is so——," said the Marshal.

"But it *is* so!" the Baron exclaimed.

"Well, then," said Von der Goltz, "seeing that what you say is the case, I am going to place an officer at your disposal. He will go with you to the goods shed at the Gare du Nord, where you will certainly find your belongings."

The Procureur Général went off with the officer, and it is impossible to describe his surprise when he arrived at the goods station and found himself amongst piles and piles of boxes, all classed according to the various towns from which they had come, and all destined to Germany. These boxes were packed with goods that had been stolen by German officers in their advance through Belgium. Baron Terlinden restrained his feelings with difficulty.

Amongst the boxes that had come from Malines and district, Baron Terlinden opened several cases and found a number of things that belonged to him. But, most interesting of all, he also found

that besides the articles that had been taken from Schiplaeken, there were other things belonging to other houses, and this is what happened.

As he was continuing to hunt through the boxes in order to recover objects particularly dear to him, the Ober-Lieutenant said to him—

“Why do you need to open all these boxes? Why don't you take all that is in this box, for instance? You will have sufficient compensation then. Don't you think so?”

Baron Terlinden was surprised.

“Sir,” said he, “I do not want to be the accomplice of German thieves.”

To this the Ober-Lieutenant was unable to reply.

Here is another point. When the Procureur Général was leaving the goods yard, the German soldiers were loading wagons, destined to Germany, with the products of officially organised thefts in Belgium—all of which had been carried out under the full knowledge and sanction of his Excellence the Marshal Von der Goltz-Pasha, temporary—you will notice that I say “temporary”—Governor of Belgium. You must notice particularly the fact that when Baron Terlinden complained about his valuables being stolen, Von der Goltz immediately sent him to the goods shed where they were. There is, therefore, no doubt whatever but that the Marshal knew all about the pillage that had taken place.

## CHAPTER V

### BOERTMEERBEECK

THE day after our expedition to Schiplaeken we returned again to the battle front south of Malines, and spent several hours in carrying in wounded men. The scene of action crept nearer and nearer to Antwerp every day. At first we had some distance to go before we reached the Belgian troops, but this distance decreased gradually until in a few weeks' time we had the actual fighting almost at our doors. Two days after our having rescued the wounded men at Schiplaeken we had another exciting experience and another very narrow escape.

Early in the morning—it was on a Sunday—we set off to Malines and brought back a car-load of Red Cross materials which had been abandoned during the first bombardment of the town. In Antwerp we were asked by the General Etat-Major to find out if possible whether there were any wounded Belgian soldiers lying in a dense thicket between Wespelear and Louvain. After very heavy fighting a few days before the whole of the road to Louvain had been occupied by the Germans.

Two other motor-cars belonging to the Red Cross came with us, and when we reached Malines we were fortunate enough to meet the ambulancier



who had acted as our guide to Schiplaeken. He came with us and we set off at once along the main road to Louvain. At the height of Hever we branched off to the left, as we did not dare to run any longer on the high road in full daylight and in such a position as to make ourselves conspicuous to the whole surrounding countryside.

As soon as we turned into the narrow road, with its borders of poplar trees, we were at least safe from detection. Through a perfect maze of narrow lanes we spun, in and out, until we came to a large building. This was the Hospice of Ravenstein, a home for old people, but it had been converted into a Red Cross hospital and had been used by both Belgians and Germans. We drove in through the high iron gate and ran our cars out of sight behind a big row of trees that fronted the terrace a few yards away from the house.

The Sisters and nuns of this charitable institution received us very kindly. They told us that amongst the wounded soldiers left in their care there were only three Belgians, but a number of Germans who were so seriously injured that it had been, and was, impossible to transfer them. The Sisters also told us, when we asked them about the presence of wounded Belgians in the thicket to which we were going, that they had heard from the peasants that many Belgian soldiers had lain there for three days, absolutely unattended to, and without food or drink or any help to dress their wounds.

We decided to proceed on foot towards the wood at once. Two peasants volunteered to come with us. They secured two wheelbarrows from a little farm near by, and on these we placed a number of stretchers and went off. It was a very hot day, and we had walked for nearly half an hour, when we reached the somewhat big village of Boertmeerbeeck. The Sisters of Mercy belonging to a small convent in the village told us that our destination was still some distance off. They also told us that they had hidden away a wounded Belgian soldier and they asked us if we would take him away with us. We found that this man was very young. A bullet had made a terrible gash in his breast, fully twelve inches long. It had struck him at the right side and run right across his body and out at the left, making a deep, open furrow in the fleshy part of the breast. The Sisters had sewn and dressed his wound and he was on the way to recovery. We said that we would take him with us on our way back. By the way, these poor Sisters of Mercy had gathered together a large number of rifles and a quantity of ammunition which they had found in the surrounding ditches. These they had hidden under heaps of manure in a neighbouring field.

We proceeded on our way under a scorching sun. It was so oppressively hot that we agreed amongst us that even if we did find the wounded men it would be impossible to carry them such a long distance back to the Hospice of Ravenstein. Albert and I said we would go back and fetch

our car, which was the largest one, with us. We were not keen on having the motor-cars with us at all because there was always a danger of being captured by the enemy, and we did not want our cars confiscated.

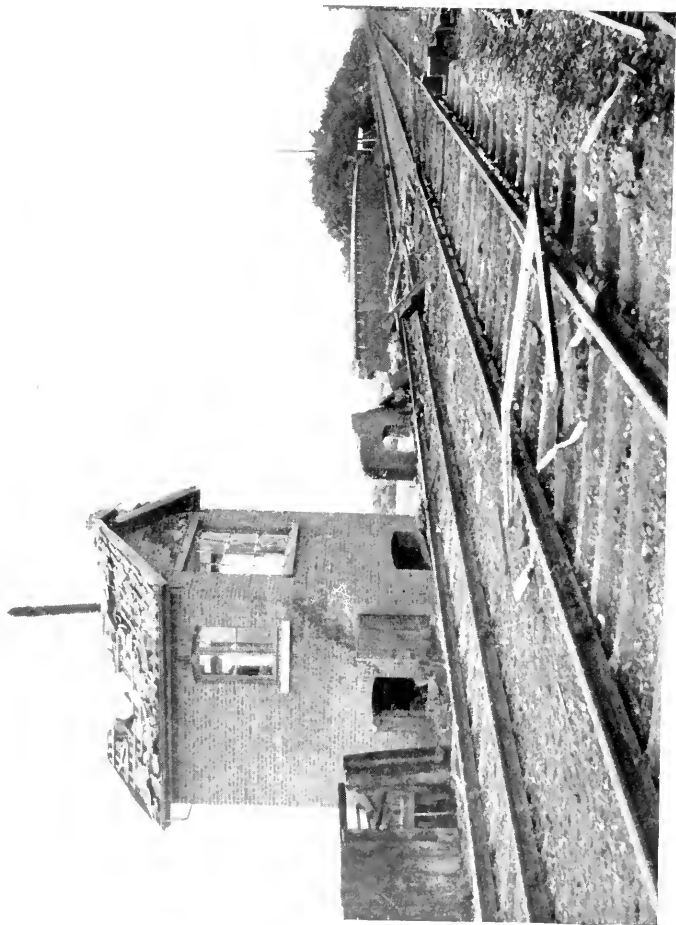
After a time we reached the Hospice, got our car and hurried back to where we had left the other men. When we got there we found a boy waiting for us with a message. This was to tell us to hide the car somewhere and hurry after the others on foot. We stopped the car near a railway crossing and hid it behind a thick hedge that surrounded a little deserted farmyard. We knew that we were nearing the scene of action because the ditches on both sides of the road were full of discarded equipment—knapsacks, broken rifles, helmets and caps, torn clothes of both armies.

Now for some reason or other Albert asked me if I would mind staying behind to look after the car. This seemed quite unnecessary as the countryside was deserted. And, candidly, I had no special desire to remain alone in a deserted farmyard with the possibility of a party of Germans coming round the corner at any minute. I discovered later that Albert had a queer intuition that there was danger ahead and he knew that I, with no Red Cross badge or uniform, would not fare at all well. At any rate he set off and I did not see him again for six hours, during which I suffered all manner of mental pain.

It was, if anything, even warmer than it had

been. In the heat of the sun the whole surrounding country seemed to be sleeping. There was not a sound anywhere. After a time I ventured out of the farmyard and went towards the railway. The gates were open and stray cattle were walking leisurely on the tracks. Broken telegraph wires were hanging on one side of the line in heavy bights. There was a little brick-walled cabin—such as was used by railwaymen—a few yards up the line. I went towards it and found evidence of the fierceness of the fighting that had taken place near by. The woodwork was riddled with bullets and the brick walls were chipped as though some one had gone over them with a sharp-pointed hammer. The door was open. I looked inside, and this is what I saw. On the rough table, between a cheap brown earthenware coffeepot and a big yellow straw hat was perched a solitary hen, which looked as seriously at me as I, no doubt, did at it!

After a time I returned to the farmyard. I went into a little barn full of straw and thought I would sleep in order to pass away the time. I was just lying down when a thought struck me—my friends might return while I was asleep and might go off without me. So sleep was out of the question. I walked about, I sat in the car, I smoked my pipe—I did all manner of things to kill time—but still no one came, and the hours went past slowly. Eventually, when I was debating as to whether I should return to Boertmeerbeeck on foot and tell of the disappearance of my companions, they



Near Boertmeerbeek. "There was a little brick-walled cabin a few yards up the line,"



arrived, more dead than alive, and I heard what had happened.

When Albert left me he walked on till he came up to the other men who were resting by the wayside in the shade of the trees. With them he proceeded cautiously towards a wood that lay ahead. One of the Red Cross doctors, thinking that the men might be lying somewhere near, spoke aloud, but quietly, several times to let any wounded Belgians know that friends were at hand. No answer came—and the little party began to get nervous. They entered the wood and walked in and out amongst the trees. Here they found many proofs of the presence of wounded soldiers—blood-stained bandages that had been made of handkerchiefs and sleeves of shirts, discarded empty water-bottles, and other equipment. Here also they found some of the willow baskets which the Germans use for carrying shells. Albert took one of them with him as a souvenir.

They were still wandering amongst the trees in search of wounded Belgians when they noticed ahead of them three men, in shirtsleeves, digging in the wood. Without thought of danger they went immediately towards them, meaning to inquire about the wounded soldiers. They had not gone thirty yards when suddenly seven or eight German infantrymen with raised rifles came from behind the trees. The coatless men turned out to be Germans also. Instantly the Red Cross men put up their hands, and while the rifles were still levelled at them, an under officer—Albert took him to

be a sergeant—searched each one of them for weapons, asked many questions of Albert as to why he had the willow basket, finally taking it away from him, and then, with sundry curses, blindfolded each man with his own handkerchief. The peasants were released, although their barrows were confiscated, then the others were ordered to march in front of the German soldiers, blindfolded and with their arms raised above their heads—“which is,” said Albert, “a very awkward and unpleasant way of walking—especially amongst trees.”

The rest of the story I will tell in Albert’s own words.

“We were driven along by means of jabs in the back with rifle butts. Every now and then when we reached some obstacle in the way—a large stone or a tree trunk or such-like—we were told to lift our feet high. The German idea of humour was to tell us to do so on one occasion when we came to a ditch, the result being that nearly all of us fell down.

“After what seemed hours of stumbling along, we were ordered to stop. Then we were placed side by side with our backs against a wall. I tell you frankly, a queer feeling came over me when I felt my friends on either side of me. I really thought we were going to have a taste of the *derniers jours d’un condamné*, and I felt uncomfortable enough. It is no use boasting about it. I believe that every one of us was cursing himself for the foolhardy manner in which we had run into trouble.



“ Suddenly we were surprised to hear ourselves addressed in French. Whoever it was who spoke to us, he must have been some one in high authority, as we, in our blindfolded state, gathered by the way the other men addressed him. He asked us who we were and where we were going and what was our mission. One of our men answered him in German, and told him we belonged to the Croix Rouge of Antwerp and that we were searching in the fields and woods for dead and wounded men.

“ The officer then said that they, the Germans, did not recognise the ‘Convention of Geneva.’ He asked one of the doctors, who wore the Red Cross doctors’ uniform, if he was an officer. Of course he was told ‘No.’ He then told us that we could let our aching arms down, and ordered us to hand over any papers we had. These he examined for a long time, evidently reading carefully the contents of my little book of instructions, and then he returned them to us, only half convinced that we were neither spies nor disguised officers.

“ After a time he left us, with a great noise of rifle butts hitting the ground and many grunted orders. We were commanded to march forward again, hands up, and were sent in the right direction by means of further knocks with the butts of rifles, until we came to where a large number of cavalry horses were. We could hear the noise of their hoofs and the rattle of chains in their harness. Then we were allowed to lower our

arms and to sit down on a wooden bench. Then we were given a bucket of water, out of which we had each to drink, and a loaf of stale rye bread, which none of us touched. We had had no food, as you know, since early in the morning, but none of us felt much like eating at that time. Our near future was of more importance to us than food. We did not know what was going to become of us. All of us knew what had happened to the Red Cross men at Louvain, and I did not fancy the prospect of going to Germany to dig potatoes or trenches.

“In the middle of our meditations, we were told to get up by the sergeant who had arrested us. My eyes were aching owing to the tightness of the handkerchief that had been tied over them. My arms were still sore, but we were ordered to raise them above our heads again, and then we were marched forward once more. We had to go across ploughed fields, and it was a very exhausting journey. At last we reached a road and we were pushed along it with the rifle butts again. We plodded on and on in silence, stumbling against stones and so on, until one of our men fell down. We heard him fall and we feared that he had perhaps been struck down by a bayonet thrust. One of us could bear the suspense no longer, so he tore the handkerchief from his eyes and found that we were alone!

“That was one form of German cruelty. There were we walking blindly along. If this man had not taken his handkerchief away—and doing so

might have meant his death—there is no saying what might have happened to us. As it was, we were faint and dazed. We had no idea as to the right direction to go, and it was only by pure luck that we were able to find our bearings so that we could return to the farm.”

But in spite of their suffering, I still think that I had my share !

We drove back to Boertmeerbeeck and got food from the Sisters of Mercy. We then got the wounded man in our car and went on to the Hospice of Ravenstein, where we got other three wounded soldiers, whom we took back to Antwerp with us.

Now at Boertmeerbeeck the Sisters of Mercy told us that in the morning of that same day they had sent some women to the thicket where we were arrested to throw some food to the wounded Belgians who lay there. The Germans did not allow any male peasants to go near. They threatened to shoot them instantly. The women got near enough to the wood to throw some bread to the fringe of it. They then saw wounded, haggard soldiers crawl out towards the food. The women were going to go towards the men when the Germans drove them off. This was about ten o'clock in the morning, and proves, of course, that the Belgians were alive in the wood and that they were well enough to crawl for food and to eat it. Yet when Albert and the other men searched the same wood two hours later they found nothing but discarded equipment and blood-

stained bandages—and the newly dug graves which the Germans were filling in. . . .

The murder of wounded men is but another German custom of warfare. And when murder is carried out on a wholesale scale the Germans do not always wait until their victims are dead before burying them. Grave-digging is seldom done by the Germans themselves. Belgian peasants are forced, as a rule, to dig the graves for their murdered fellow-citizens. Sometimes the peasants have to dig their own burial places. In some cases fathers have actually been forced to bury their own sons; dead parents have been buried by their own children. The Germans superintended the ghastly work.

The case of Tamines, a rich and well-populated village on the river Sambre, between Charleroi and Namur, proves all these statements. The sheer awfulness of the massacre is staggering. From August 17 to August 19 the village was occupied by French troops. On August 20, a patrol of Uhlans rode up to the outskirts of the town. The French opened fire and, aided by a number of the Garde Civique of Charleroi, killed and wounded several Prussians and drove the others off. The people in the neighbouring houses came out with cries of "Vive la Belgique!" and "Vive la France!" This alone was responsible for the terrible revenge that followed.

Some time afterwards on the same day the Germans came along in force, entered the tiny village of Alloux, burnt two houses, and made all

the inhabitants prisoners. There followed an artillery duel between the opposing armies.

About five o'clock next day the Germans carried the bridge at Tamines, crossed the River Sambre, and began defiling in mass through the streets of the village. About eight o'clock the movement of troops stopped, and the soldiers penetrated into the houses, drove out the inhabitants, set themselves to sack the place, and then burnt it.

The unfortunate peasants who stopped in the village were shot; the rest fled from their houses. The greater part of them were arrested either on the night of August 21 or on the following morning. Pillage and burning continued all next day (22nd).

On the evening of August 22, a group of between 400 and 450 men was collected in front of the church, not far from the bank of the Sambre. A German detachment opened fire on them, but as the shooting was a slow business the officers ordered up a machine gun, which soon swept off all the unhappy peasants still left standing.

Many of them were only wounded, and, hoping to save their lives, got with difficulty on their feet again. They were immediately shot down. Many wounded still lay among the corpses. Groans of pain and cries for help were heard in the bleeding heap.

On several occasions soldiers walked up to such unhappy individuals and stopped their groans with a bayonet thrust. At night some who still survived succeeded in crawling away. Others put an end to their own pain by rolling themselves

into the neighbouring river. About one hundred bodies were found in the water.

Next day, Sunday, the 23rd, about six o'clock in the morning, another party, consisting of prisoners made in the village and the neighbourhood, were brought into the square. One of them makes the following deposition :—

“ On reaching the square the first thing that we saw was a mass of bodies of civilians extending at least over forty yards in length by six yards in depth. They had evidently been drawn up in rank to be shot. We were placed before this range of corpses and were convinced that we, too, were to be shot.

“ An officer then came forward and asked for volunteers to dig trenches to bury these corpses. I and my brother-in-law and certain others offered ourselves. We were conducted to a neighbouring field at the side of the square, where they made us dig a trench fifteen yards long by ten broad and two deep. Each received a spade. While we were digging the trenches soldiers with fixed bayonets gave us our orders.

“ As I was much fatigued, through not being accustomed to digging, and being faint from hunger, a soldier then brought me a lighter spade, and afterwards filled a bucket of water for us to drink. I asked him if he knew what they were going to do with us. He said that he did not. By the time that the trenches were finished it was about noon. They then gave us some planks, on which we placed the corpses and so carried

them to the trench. I recognised many of the persons whose bodies we were burying. Actually fathers buried the bodies of their sons and sons the bodies of their fathers. The women of the village had been marched out into the square, and saw us at our work. All round were the burnt houses.

“There were in the square both soldiers and officers. They were drinking champagne. The more the afternoon drew on the more they drank, and the more we were disposed to think that we were probably to be shot, too. We buried from three hundred and fifty to four hundred bodies. A list of the names of the victims has been drawn up and will be given to you (the Commissioner).

“While some of us were carrying the corpses along I saw a case where they had stopped and called to a German doctor. They had noticed that the man whom they were conveying was still alive. The doctor examined the wounded man and made a sign that he was to be buried with the rest.

“The plank on which he was lying was borne on again, and I saw the wounded man raise his arm elbow-high. They called to the doctor again, but he made a gesture that he was to go into the trench with the others.

“I saw M. X—— carrying off the body of his own son-in-law. He was able to take away his watch, but was not allowed to remove some papers which were on him.

“When a soldier, seized with an impulse of

pity, came near us, an officer immediately scolded him away. When all the bodies had been interred, certain wounded were brought to the church. Officers consulted about them for some time.

“Four mounted officers came into the square, and, after a long conversation, we with our wives and children were made to fall into marching order. We were taken through Tamines, amid the debris which obstructed the streets, and led to Vilaines between two ranks of soldiers. Think of our moral sufferings during this march! We all thought that we were going to be shot in the presence of our wives and children. I saw German soldiers who could not refrain from bursting into tears on seeing the despair of the women. One of our party was seized with an apoplectic fit from mere terror, and I saw many who fainted.”

When the cortège arrived at Vilaines, an officer told the unhappy people that they were free, but that anyone returning to Tamines would be shot. He obliged the women and children to cry “Vive l’Allemagne.”

The Germans burnt, after sacking them, two hundred and sixty-four houses in Tamines. Many persons, including women and children, were burnt or stifled in their own homes. Many others were shot in the fields. The total number of victims was over six hundred and fifty.

The German excuse for such massacres and sacking is usually that the civilians first of all fired on the soldiers. But every surviving inhabitant of Tamines swears unanimously to the con-



trary. They explained the massacre of their fellow-villagers by the fact that the Germans attributed to the inhabitants the shots which had been fired by the French skirmishers, or perhaps to the anger produced among the Germans by the success of an attack which had been made on them that night by the French troops.

About this time, Dinant, a quaint old Walloon city on the Meuse between Namur and the French frontier, and, like Tamines, also in the province of Namur, was sacked and destroyed. Its population was decimated between August 22 and August 25.

On August 15, the German troops coming up from the East were routed by the French soldiers who were situated on the left bank of the river Meuse. The French crossed the river in pursuit of the enemy. The town had little to suffer on that day. Some houses were destroyed by German shells, aimed no doubt at French regiments on the left bank, and a citizen of Dinant belonging to the Red Cross was killed by a German bullet as he was picking up a wounded man.

The days which followed were calm. The French occupied the neighbourhood of the town. No engagement took place between the hostile armies, and nothing happened which could be interpreted as an act of hostility by the population. No German troops were anywhere near Dinant.

On Friday, the 21st, about nine o'clock in the evening, German troops coming down the road from Ciney entered the town by the Rue St. Jacques.

On entering they began firing into the windows of the houses, and killed a workman who was returning to his own house, wounded another inhabitant, and forced him to cry, "Long live the Kaiser."

They bayoneted a third person in the stomach. They entered the cafés, seized the liquor, got drunk, and retired after having set fire to several houses and broken the doors and windows of others. The population was terrorised and stupefied, and shut itself up in its dwellings.

Saturday, August 22, was a day of relative calm. All life, however, was at an end in the streets.

On Sunday morning next, the 23rd, at six-thirty in the morning, soldiers of the 108th Regiment of Infantry invaded the Church of the Premonstratensian Fathers, drove out the congregation, separated the women from the men, and shot fifty of the latter. Between seven and nine the same morning the soldiers gave themselves up to pillage and arson, going from house to house and driving the inhabitants into the street. Those who tried to escape were shot.

About nine in the morning the soldiery, driving before them by blows from the butt ends of rifles men, women and children, pushed them all into the Parade Square, where they were kept prisoners till six o'clock in the evening. The guard took pleasure in repeating to them that they would soon be shot. About six o'clock a captain separated the men from the women and children.

The women were placed in front of a rank of infantry soldiers, the men were ranged along a wall.

The front rank of them were then told to kneel, the others remaining standing behind them. A platoon of soldiers drew up in face of these unhappy men. It was in vain that the women cried out for mercy for their husbands, sons, and brothers. The officer ordered his men to fire. There had been no inquiry nor any pretence of a trial. About twenty of the inhabitants were only wounded, but fell among the dead.

The soldiers, to make sure, fired another volley into the heap of them. Several citizens escaped this double discharge. They shammed dead for more than two hours, remaining motionless among the corpses, and when night fell succeeded in saving themselves in the hills. Eighty-four corpses were left on the square, and buried in a neighbouring garden.

The day of August 23 was made bloody by several more massacres. Soldiers discovered some inhabitants of the Faubourg St. Pierre in the cellars of a brewery there and shot them.

Since the previous evening a crowd of workmen belonging to the factory of M. Himmer had hidden themselves, along with their wives and children, in the cellars of the building. They had been joined there by many neighbours and several members of the family of their employer. About six o'clock in the evening these unhappy people made up their minds to come out of their refuge,

and defiled, all trembling, from the cellars with the white flag in front.

They were immediately seized and violently attacked by the soldiers. Every man was shot on the spot. Almost all the men of the Faubourg de Leffe were executed *en masse*. In another part of the town twelve civilians were killed in a cellar. In the Rue en Ile a paralytic was shot in his arm-chair. In the Rue Enfer the soldiers killed a young boy of fourteen.

In the Faubourg de Neffe the viaduct of the railway was the scene of a bloody massacre. An old woman and all her children were killed in their cellar. A man of sixty-five years, his wife, his son and his daughter were shot against a wall. Other inhabitants of Neffe were taken in a barge as far as the rock of Bayard and shot there, among them a woman of eighty-three and her husband.

A considerable body of men and women had been locked up in the court of the prison. At six in the evening a German machine gun, placed on the hill above, opened fire on them, and an old woman and three other persons were brought down.

While a certain number of soldiers were perpetrating this massacre, others pillaged and sacked the houses of the town, and broke open all safes, sometimes blasting them with dynamite. Their work of destruction and theft accomplished, the soldiers set fire to the houses, and the town was soon no more than an immense furnace.

The women and children had all been shut up in a convent, where they were kept prisoners for

four days. These unhappy women remained in ignorance of the lot of their male relations. They were expecting themselves to be shot also. All around the town continued to blaze. The first day the monks of the convent had given them a certain supply of food. For the remaining days they had nothing to eat but raw carrots and green fruit.

To sum up, the town of Dinant was destroyed. It counted one thousand four hundred houses ; only two hundred remain. The manufactories where the artisan population worked were systematically reduced to ruins. Rather more than seven hundred of the inhabitants were killed ; others were taken off to Germany, and are still retained there as prisoners. The majority are refugees scattered all through Belgium and England. A few who remained in the town nearly died of hunger.

It has been proved by the Belgian Commission of Inquiry that German soldiers, while exposed to the fire of the French entrenched on the opposite bank of the Meuse, in certain cases sheltered themselves behind a line of civilians, women and children.

A week later the Kaiser's dictum went forth by German wireless to the world :

*“ The only means of preventing surprise attacks from the civil population has been to interfere with unrelenting severity, and to create examples which by their frightfulness would be a warning to all Belgium.”*

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ART TREASURES OF MALINES

ON the first of September, two days after having been taken prisoner by the Germans, my friend Albert returned early in the day to Malines, and from there went into the battlefield around Sempst and Hofstade and spent the whole morning carrying wounded men in his car to Antwerp, while I, with a very high temperature, and very low spirits, spent a miserable day in bed, trying to while away the long hours with an impossible French novel that the *femme de chambre* had lent me.

In the early afternoon a priest in civilian dress, the Abbé Barbé, signalled to my friend to stop, and then asked him if he would help to save the shrine of St. Rombold, a very costly work of silver and gold, about three feet high by five feet long. It was impossible to get this very valuable piece of antique jewellery on the car, so Albert commandeered the only conveyance he could find that was large enough for the work. This, as it happened, was a brewer's dray belonging to Van Diepenbeeck, one of the most important of the local brewers!

After a great deal of work, in which they were helped by a few men of the town who had not yet

fled, they managed to get the shrine on the cart and then had it taken by road to Antwerp, where it was stored away in a secret place of safety, whose name, for obvious reasons, I am not entitled to mention. The same day Albert brought back from St. Rombold's Cathedral to Antwerp a byzantin picture representing "Our Lady of the Miracle."

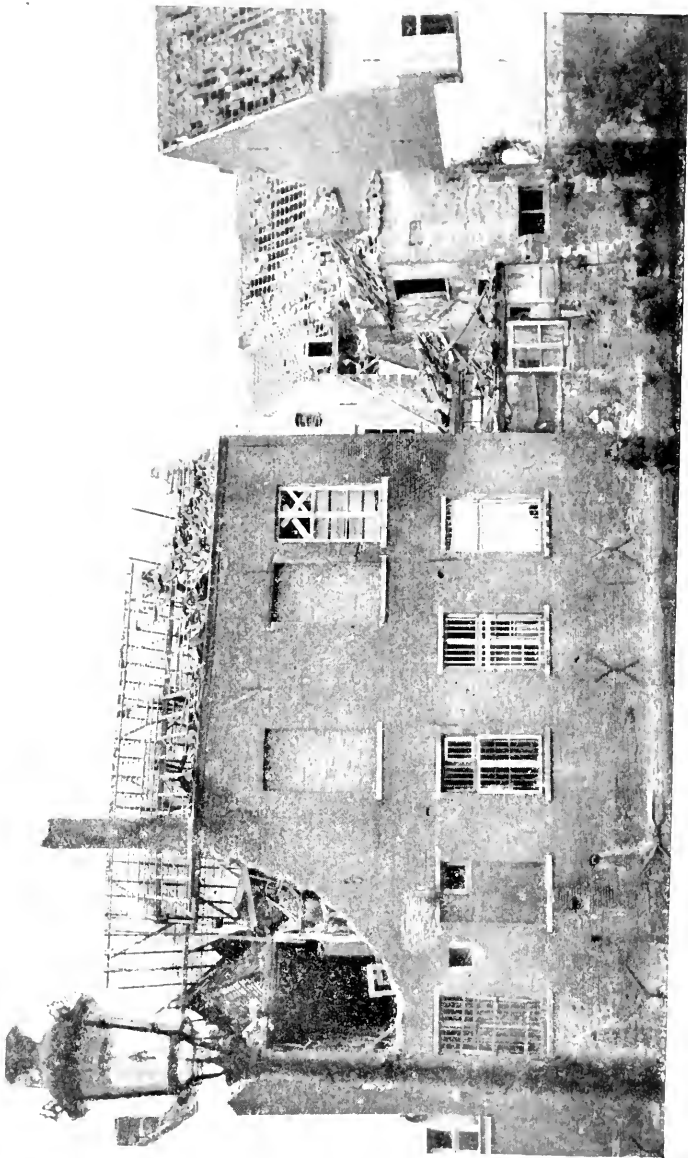
Under fire of the shells which were bursting over and on Malines, my friend and the Abbé went from St. Rombold's to the Church of St. John, which had not yet suffered from the German shells. St. Rombold's Cathedral, however, had already been hit several times by heavy shells, which did great damage to the left southerly wing of the church, where they had pierced the walls and ceiling in different places and had already ruined a very fine retable.

Now in the Church of St. John there were some very valuable pictures. The most important of these was the famous triptych of Rubens representing "The Adoration of the Wise Men." This work, composed of two lateral panels and a centre piece, was of tremendous size and weight. Before they could reach it, however, the two men had to break into the church, which was locked. It was impossible to handle the triptych by themselves, so my friend and the Abbé went out into the town to hunt for help. After a search through several deserted streets they came across an inspector of police in civilian dress, two gendarmes and a working man. These men readily agreed to assist in the work of removing the pictures.

The six then returned to the church, where they managed to rig up tackle that Albert had taken with him from Antwerp. After three or four hours of hard work, in which they had to exercise the greatest care, the men found their exertions successful, for they managed to take the triptych down without so much as the very slightest scratch. One man was sent to find a car, but before he could secure one he had to go to Neckerspoel, a suburb of Malines to the east. Here he got a flat dray and two horses and drove them to the church. The central piece of the picture was then tied between cushions made of hay and blankets, given by an old woman who came upon the scene and who, as it happened, lived close to the church, and sent under control of one of the gendarmes to Antwerp, where it arrived about midnight and by a mistake was received at the cathedral. Next day it was removed to the National Museum of Pictures. The two side panels were taken in the motor-car to the Museum, and my friend Albert has now in his possession the receipt he received for them from the keeper of the Museum, M. Pol de Mont.

Next day, the second of September, Albert went with M. Deckers, of Antwerp, to the Minister of Fine Arts, M. Pouillet, and in order to prevent any untimely interference, told him what he had done. M. Pouillet thanked him heartily for his work, and commissioned him and M. Deckers and the Abbé Barbé to proceed with the salvage of the other works of fine art in Malines. So that





Malines. The effects of shell fire.



day Albert went to the second most important church of Malines, "Our Lady over the Dyle" ("Onze Lieve Vrouw over de Dyle"). He found the church so badly damaged by shell fire that he decided to proceed at once to save not only the pictures but everything else available. The southerly side of the church had several great holes in its walls. The beautiful fine stained glass was shattered into mere splinters. The inside was littered with stones and woodwork from the ruined walls.

I do not know exactly what articles were saved from this church, as it was impossible to keep any account of them and as it was necessary to carry out the work of salvage with the utmost speed. In all, three motor-cars, Albert's and two others which he commandeered as they were passing through the town, were loaded up with the finest Renaissance chasubles, the costly chalices of gold and precious stones, the antependii of renowned leather of Malines, the precious laces, all the most valuable standards of the religious guilds, as well as many minor pictures of good masters. These antependii, (frontpieces of altars), by the way, were discovered lying behind a wooden altar, where they had probably lain for a hundred years. In order to secure the chalices, chasubles and laces, the rescuers were compelled to break open the door that led into the vestry. This door was of beautifully carved oak, hundreds of years old, and hatchets and crowbars were required before it could be opened. It was heart-breaking work

to spoil such a priceless work of art, but it was necessary, and the priests who were present thought that the saving of the other valuables was of more importance than the preserving of the door.

Rubens' masterpiece "The Miraculous Draught of Fishes" ("La pêche miraculeuse") used to hang above the altar of this church. My friend, however, found that it had been taken away. He went out to see if he could discover anyone who knew of its whereabouts. Another old woman—only old women remained in the town!—told him she knew where it was, so he went with her and she took him to a gymnasium in Rue Louise, where, in a narrow lobby, he found the world-famous masterpiece lying bare against a stone wall without any protection whatever. Another cart was commandeered—it also belonged to Van Diepenbeeck, the brewer—more cushions of blankets and hay were made, and this triptych of Rubens was sent to Antwerp in charge of one of the men who had been assisting in the removal of the other sacred goods.

Returning to Malines a second time, Albert brought back from St. John's Church the small wooden statue of "Our Lady of Montaigu," sculptured by Faidherbe, and two paintings, "St. Francois d'Assises," by Herreyns, and "St. Jean Baptiste," by an unknown painter.

On the third of September he returned to the Church of St. John, where he secured the following treasures and returned with them to Antwerp: gold chalices and paxes, thuribles, candlesticks,

etc., with fine chasubles. On that day also he brought back from the same church the following paintings :

“ Veronica ” by Craeyer,

“ The Disciples of Emmaüs ” by Herreyns,

“ Jesus Blessing the Children ” by Van Loon,

“ Adoration of the Wise Men ” by Simon de Vos,

“ Annunciation ” supposed to be by Rubens,

“ Pieta ” by Janssens,

“ Christ on the Cross ” attributed to Rubens.

In the Cardinal's Palace he found that the great composition of Van Dyck, “ Christ on His Cross,” had been cut out of its frame the day before, rolled up and stowed away in the cellar vaults. This he secured and brought away with him.

Returning to the Church of “ Our Lady over the Dyle,” Albert then decided that he would try to save the famous statue of “ Our Lady of the Seven Dolours,” which, as all art-lovers know, is a wooden statue sculptured by the master-sculptor Faidherbe, a contemporary of Rubens, and a genius who was to Sculpture what Rubens was to Painting. Now this statue was fastened to a pillar at the right-hand side of the choir at a height of fully thirty feet. Being over five feet high, the statue was of considerable weight. Accordingly Albert climbed up to the narrow gallery above it, and with the aid of two straps and some tackle raised it from the cornice of the pillar and brought it uninjured to the ground. With the assistance of some of the other helpers he managed to get it into his car, and then took it to Antwerp.

On Friday, September 4, Albert again went back to Malines. On the advice of the Honorary Archive Keeper of the town of Antwerp, one of the greatest authorities on art in Europe to-day, he went once more to the Cathedral of St. Rombold. Here, just under the damaged south wall of the church, had been hung for innumerable years and very much unknown a series of twenty-four very old and dust-covered pictures. These, hung in frames which each contained four, represented the life of St. Rombold, the patron saint of the church.

The twenty-four frames were all of the same size, each being about three feet by two. Albert loaded his car with them and took them to Antwerp. Two of them had been injured by burst shells. Indeed, some of the pieces were embedded in the wood on which the pictures were painted. Now a high authority on art, one who is well known as an authority on all questions of painting, is absolutely certain that these panels, although of various ages, are nevertheless *primitives* of great value, and he goes so far as to state that two of them at least have been painted by the Van Eycks.

I must mention here a series of very interesting historical works that were also saved. These are between twenty-five and thirty panels of no real artistic value but of very great age—"The Arms of the Toison d'Or, or Golden Fleece." In years gone by, at every meeting of the High Knights of the Chapter of the Golden Fleece, each noble present had his coat-of-arms painted and dated

in a framed panel of lozenge shape. These were then hung together on the pillars or walls of St. Rombold's church to commemorate the reunion of this most exalted order. Some of the coats-of-arms bore the date of the very first meeting of the Chapter, 1429. These, on account of their historical value, were taken down and removed to Antwerp.

The same day also were saved many valuable *objets d'art* from the Cardinal's Palace, and also the Holy Vessels of St. Rombold. My friend also received from the only remaining curate of the Béguinage of Malines the world-renowned ivory crucifix sculptured by the great Duquesnoy out of an enormous tusk. This very famous and truly magnificent piece of work was taken to a place of safety in Antwerp. By this time Albert and those who had helped him had saved the most important works in the churches of Malines, but next day, September 5, he transported the remaining valuables from the Cardinal's Palace.

A few days later the Germans again bombarded Malines, but only for a few hours. The Burgomaster of the town, M. Dessain (of English descent) consulted with my friend, and, as a result, the two of them went to Antwerp, interviewed M. de Vos, the Burgomaster, and asked him to help them to save the archives of the town of Malines. Albert, for some reason or other, felt that he himself was not competent to do this work, so he persuaded M. de Vos to give him the help of M. Bisschops, the actual archive-keeper of Antwerp. This gentle-

man agreed to go with Albert to save the most important works of Malines.

Five motor-cars were commandeered, and with these my friend went along with his car and managed to save all the most interesting archives of Malines—Guilds' account books, Charters seven hundred years old, and all the books of the Etat-Civil. Soon after the removal of these, the Museum in which they had been kept was destroyed by German shells.

M. Bisshops, by the way, found the famous "Missal" of Margaret of Austria which had been hidden away, and escaped with it to Antwerp, not long before the German shells again fell on Malines.

In connection with the saving of the art treasures of Malines, Captain de Keersmaecker has received the following letter from Mr. Lionel Cust, C.V.O. Mr. Cust, who is the Surveyor of the King's Pictures and Works of Art, is the author of numerous important works on Art, especially on Van Dyck.

"DEAR M. DE KEERSMAECKER,

"I am much interested in hearing that a book is about to be published in which your experiences during the siege of Malines and Antwerp will be narrated. It must be a sad and distressing story to tell, but the more that is known, the more the noble courage and unflinching endurance of your nation will be recorded for ever upon the pages of history.

"We have already been made acquainted in the *Burlington Magazine* with the results of your





Captain de Keersmaecker placing the famous missal of Margaret of Austria in his car.



heroic efforts to save the art treasures of Malines from the destruction which was being ruthlessly and unscrupulously dealt out to them by the 'Culture' of Germany. It is to your efforts that art lovers owe the safety of the famous 'Miraculous Draught of Fishes' by Rubens, the 'Crucifixion' by Van Dyck, the shrine of St. Rombold, and so many precious works of art.

"We must hope that there have been others as courageous and patriotic as yourself, who have been able to save valuable paintings and works of art in other parts of Belgium from the cruel danger which has befallen them. Louvain, Termonde, Malines, Ypres, are all dark stains on the still early history of the twentieth century. The list of such stains may not yet be exhausted.

"As an Honorary Member of the Academy of Fine Arts at Antwerp, the Academy of Rubens, Van Dyck, and Jordaens, I share in the sorrows of your nation. I have mourned deeply the loss a few years ago of my dear friend Henri Hymans, but I am thankful now that he was spared the pain and misery of seeing his country destroyed, and of sharing the sad trouble which has befallen the excellent M. Van den Branden, to whose work all students of Flemish Art are so greatly indebted."

M. Van den Branden, who is a famous Continental art expert, is my friend Albert's father-in-law.

## CHAPTER VII

### ZEPPELINS

ANTWERP in August was full of life and excitement. There was only one topic of conversation. Every one spoke of the war just as every one thought of it. Every edition of every newspaper was bought. *La Presse* and *La Métropole* and *Le Matin* and the Flemish paper *Handelsblad* were read eagerly in succession. English newspapers were in great demand. One *Daily Telegraph* would go around a dozen people. And besides the published news were the constant rumours. The German fleet was sunk a dozen times each week. The German army sprang from the ruins of its annihilation, only to be trapped by the invincible Allies. More German prisoners were made than had ever left the Fatherland.

No one had any thought of immediate danger. The brilliant days found folks at every corner discussing battle news. At nights the cafés were thronged with people. The lights burned brightly, and it was not until the "wee sma' hours" that folks went off to bed. There was no fear of the Germans, who were yet a long way off.

Then came the Zeppelin, and the sleeping Anversois awoke to what was a very real danger. Of Zeppelins—the unlucky air-craft whose career

had been till now a long succession of disasters and tragedy—folks had not thought. Their physical and mental wakening was sudden.

About one o'clock in the morning of August 25, a German Zeppelin, coming from the south and sailing very high, came over the sleeping city, lowered itself until it reached a height of about five hundred yards above the unsuspecting town, and then, after pre-arranged buildings had been calmly picked out, bombs were dropped with the object of hitting the most vital parts of Antwerp. Practically the whole of the inhabitants of the city were aroused from sleep by the thunderous noise made by the bursting of the shells.

The Zeppelin came, as I have said, from the south and was steering due north. Where it came from is not definitely known, but the general opinion was that it had sailed from the old Belgian aerodrome of St. Agathe, in Brussels, which was at that time occupied by the Germans. Its course over the city of Antwerp was very easily followed as it dropped ten bombs in all; the direction it took was marked out as plainly as is the track of a "hare" in a paper chase.

The first bomb fell in the garden of Mlle. Belpaire in the Rue Karel Ooms, causing considerable material damage only. But this bomb was evidently intended for the Minerva Motor Works nearby. Since the war broke out the Minerva Works were turning out at a great rate armoured cars, Red Cross ambulance cars, ammunition and field motor lorries and wagons, as well as

heavy shells, rifles, and other war implements which were no longer able to be furnished by the National Factory of Arms at Herstal, near Liége, which had been destroyed by the enemy during the earliest days of the war. If the bomb really was aimed at this factory—and, after all, the dropping of bombs, as will be shown, was far from being haphazard and indiscriminate—the German knowledge of not only the whereabouts of the Minerva Works but also of their having been made use of as an arsenal evidences the espionage which existed in Antwerp throughout the war. The general conviction in Antwerp was that the crew of the Zeppelin must have contained a former resident of the town.

The second bomb was dropped in the Rue Lozane. It fell on an untenanted house, No. 240, next to the aerated water manufactory of Messrs. Bridges and Co. This bomb dug a great hole in the ground, wrecked the front and side of the house, destroyed several big trees, broke down the iron railings around the villa, and sent flying pieces across the road to houses on the opposite side, one of which had its front room shattered, and all of which had their windows broken and their front walls chipped.

I visited the scene of the outrage. The actual force of a bomb explosion is terrific. The bombs might have wrecked the most important buildings in Antwerp had they hit them. One of the houses in the Rue Lozane, opposite the spot where the bomb fell, was the house of Madame Van den

Broeck, whose front room it was that had been wrecked.

I called on Madame Van den Broeck and saw the remains of her *salon*. Walls and furniture and pictures and ornaments had all been smashed. The carpet had been ripped up; the curtains and draperies were torn into shreds. The fine chandelier was riddled with pieces of the bomb. The piano had collapsed in a heap, although the piece of music that stood on it was untouched.

Madame Van den Broeck apologised for the "untidiness" of the room! It was so hopeless to do anything immediate towards putting it in order that she had just left it as it was. Besides, said she, it was interesting. All her friends had been to see it, and other folks were coming as well. It was a *chambre célèbre*. If it had not been war-time Madame might have charged admission and reaped some benefit from her show-room. She might even have made enough money to pay for the repairing of the room, in the doing of which repairing, however, she would figuratively have killed the goose that laid the golden eggs. We discussed all this over an excellent bottle of wine which Monsieur and Madame Van den Broeck opened for me. They believed in using the best wine they had—in case (there was always a slight possibility) the Germans came.

There was other damage that this same bomb had done. Madame Van den Broeck had her cellar well stocked with jars of preserved asparagus and French beans and other vegetables and fruit

for winter use. The force of the explosion was so great that all these jars were burst open. This upset Madame almost as much as the destruction of her charming front room.

"We have to eat nothing but asparagus now," she said to me. "It is asparagus all the time, monsieur." Then she added with the cheery characteristic philosophy which I have encountered in so many Belgian people throughout the war, "But we like asparagus, so we don't mind so much."

Still another thing that Madame told me. When the bomb burst the smell of picrite was awful. The atmosphere of the whole street was suffocating. For a time it was difficult to breathe at all in the poisonous air.

The Zeppelin meanwhile was on its way with more bombs. The third fell on the pavement in the Rue Verdussen, damaging several houses, amongst which was one occupied by M. Van de Werke, a well-known school director.

Following its course the Zeppelin then steered for the Palais de Justice, with the intention of destroying it. The distance, however, was miscalculated, for the bomb fell in the Rue de la Justice close by. It landed against a lamp-post in front of No. 8, the house occupied by M. Thys, which it damaged considerably. The houses opposite, especially those of Dr. Lemmens, Advocate Verschaeren and Councillor Nieuland, were also badly wrecked. The actual force of the pieces of outer shell that fly in all directions when the



bomb explodes is almost incredible. Huge blue quartz stones were smashed as if they had been thin pieces of slate. Thick oaken doors were riddled with openings and gaps as large as a man's head. Even the smallest piece of iron, slug or bar with which the bomb is loaded had a tremendous momentum given to it by the picrite. Some of these pieces of metal, no bigger than the top of my thumb, had torn great holes in the thick woodwork of the door, and had afterwards cut their way through a solid brick wall at the back of the lobby.

The fourth bomb fell in the back gardens of the houses in the Rue de Moy. This bomb did as much material damage as any of the others—probably more—but the fronts of the houses remained undamaged, and the houses looked quite unhurt, so the newspapers never mentioned them. Several people were slightly injured. All were covered with soot and powder and dirt. Many of them were unable to wash themselves as all basins and dishes had been smashed. Some of the people, wounded as they were, simply had to laugh when they saw what scarecrows they looked. Their white nightdresses were torn and black. They looked as if they had come down one of the chimneys.

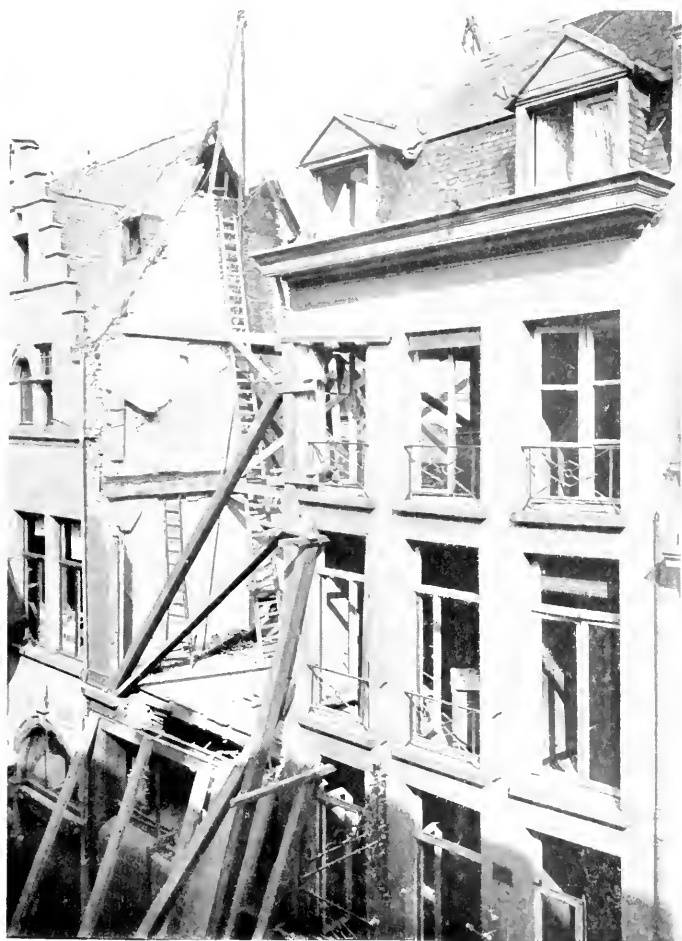
One man had a narrow escape from what would have been certain death. He jumped out of bed on hearing the first of the Zeppelin bombs and was at his window when the wreckage of his house took place. He found out afterwards that

a big piece of iron from the bomb had been driven right through the pillow on which his head had lain a few minutes before.

In the Rue Verdussen the explosion filled the houses with dust and soot. Cupboards and sideboards that looked unhurt were found, on being opened, to contain nothing but fine fragments of crystal and china.

So far the Zeppelin had not met with any great success. The next attempt made by the dirigible was to wreck the Hospital St. Elisabeth. Here again, however, the Zeppelin bomb-thrower missed his mark. The missile dropped in the grounds of the Jardin Botanique, next to the hospital, where it made a big hole several feet deep, smashed some bushes of foreign plants, and shattered glass windows within a radius of several hundred yards. The houses in the Rue Leopold were nearest to where the bomb fell, so they naturally suffered most. Many pieces of metal were scattered in the direction of the hospital, breaking through windows and becoming embedded in the ward-room walls.

The next target was worthy of a German's ambition. The Zeppelin flew towards the King's Palace and dropped a bomb—but missed it by a hundred yards. As a matter of fact, the bomb fell on the top of a small house, No. 9, in the Rue des XII mois, tenanted by M. Kainberg, a cigarette merchant. It broke through the two top stories of this house and also wrecked the house next it, the *Horse Shoe Bar*. The owner of this latter



The effect of a Zeppelin bomb in the Rue des XII Mois, Antwerp.



house was badly wounded, yet she at once thought of her maid who was upstairs at the time of the explosion. A search was straightway made. The searchers found the servant under a heap of interlaced beams and debris, absolutely without a single scratch! The beams had fallen in such a way that they formed a protecting arch over the woman's body, and on this arch had fallen a heap of stones and debris, without, however, passing through it.

The house of Dr. Mertens in the Rue des Es-crimeurs was the next building to be struck by a bomb. The missile fell on the roof, broke through and killed a servant maid and wounded other two. These latter were conveyed to the Hospital St. Elisabeth, where they recovered. I saw them some weeks later when I visited the hospital.

The result of the next bomb's explosion would have delighted the Kaiser's heart. True, it missed the Cathedral, which must have grieved the air-ship's crew, but it was a fairly successful shot, worthy of all the traditions of the German soldiers.

The Zeppelin passed north and to the east of the Cathedral, and dropped a bomb in the Poids Publics, where it caused heavy casualties. The ignorance of danger in the people's minds was largely responsible for this. In this very populous district the people had run into the streets to watch the progress of the Zeppelin. Folks appeared at their windows on every floor. Others stood at their open doors in night attire. Some stood in the centre of the street, eagerly gazing

at the huge airship. All at once it was above them and a bomb was dropped in the middle of the street. Five people were killed outright and ten others were seriously injured.

The five dead civilians—Jules van Cotthem, a policeman; Jean de Bruyn, a shopkeeper; Jean Jensen and Arthur van Hecke, dockers; and Hubertine Ramaeckers—received such terrible wounds as are made by an irregular, twisted, razor-edged slug of six pounds' weight, which meets the flesh with the velocity of a bullet.

The tenth bomb was thrown a little further on. It fell on the roof of the Caserne Falcon, in the Plaine Falcon, and killed two more men—Albert de Rycker and J. Pynenberg, who lived at No. 38.

The explosion of ten bombs: eight dead people and a dozen men and women wounded; several houses wrecked; many windows broken. That is the net result of the Zeppelin trip. Surely the great German inventor had greater dreams than this! Surely the sacrifice of hundreds of lives was not made that some day a Zeppelin would kill eight helpless innocent citizens!

Many pieces of bombs were found, and on these an inquiry was made. It was then ascertained that the type of bomb used was in the form of a short cylindrical drum, about sixteen inches in diameter, with an outside shell of iron an inch thick. Each bomb had a percussion cap on it and was loaded with picrite and iron slugs of all kinds. Whether shot or dropped from the

airship, each bomb was covered with a kind of rough, porous, inflammable hemp matting. This was soaked with petroleum or paraffin oil and set on fire when the bomb left the lancing tubes. The object of this was obviously to spread the fire to the heap of debris made by the bomb's explosion. I have some pieces of matting and several fragments of the bombs in my possession now.

Very many people in Antwerp, including my friend Albert, witnessed the Zeppelin's flight over the city that night. I didn't. I and an elderly English commercial traveller are, I believe, the only two men who slept without waking through the night! Those who saw the Zeppelin all declare that the air monster—it is over two hundred yards long and has a diameter of fifteen yards—shot four bombs out of the ten that fell. This goes to prove that a Zeppelin can shoot as well as drop its deadly missiles.

For some days the talk of the town was of Zeppelins. Outside the city, on the battle fronts, soldiers asked us questions of nothing else, and wondered if a shot could fetch the monsters down. At night folks constantly glanced up towards the sky. All through the night men searched the heavens lest the Zeppelin should return and catch the garrison unready. And then, before we had quite recovered from the first visit, the German airship came again to town. About three o'clock in the morning it was signalled coming in the direction of Cappellen. It passed west of Brasschaet and over the forest of Mariaburg.

To prevent being seen or heard, it was sailing at the very great height of over five thousand yards with its motors stopped. There was a favourable wind and the Zeppelin was drifting with it towards the sleeping—but watchful—town. At the height it was travelling and at this hour of the night, an airship would have been practically invisible. But on this night, September 3, it was particularly clear.

On nearing Antwerp, the Zeppelin was compelled for its own safety to start its motors again. By doing this it produced such a noise at the exhaust that the inhabitants of the town, who had slept with only one eye shut since the first visit, awoke at once and jumped out of their beds and scurried off like rats to their cellars, which was a very wise thing to do, because, as has been proved, the cellars of a house are the only safe places to be in during shell fire or bomb explosions.

This occurred at exactly twenty minutes to four o'clock in the morning. We who were sleeping in the centre of the town were practically undisturbed. But Albert, who lived some distance towards the south, heard the Zeppelin and from the balcony of his house saw it, as if it had been in full daylight, crossing over the lines of forts near his home. He then saw the Zeppelin drop a considerable distance in order to commence bomb-throwing again.

But by this time the airship had come within range of the forts, and the guns and rifles of the



whole sector opened fire on it. Two powerful searchlights were turned on to the Zeppelin, and as these kept it in their limelight, it was possible to see quite clearly the big yellow cigar-shape of the dirigible as well as all the particular features and details of the cars below. The Zeppelin was a splendid target. There was a great opportunity for the marksman to fetch it to the ground.

The Zeppelin crew were surprised and blinded by the glare of the flashing white light. They lost control of the airship for a moment, and in the hurry to escape anyhow and anywhere, they dropped successively and with great speed the ten bombs they were carrying, without any attempt to hit any particular building, as is proved by the places where the bombs fell.

The result of the dropping of the bombs so suddenly was this: having thrown over such a quantity of ballast, the Zeppelin went soaring up like a common balloon, but in the wildest manner, pitching and tossing in the sky in such a way that the cigar-shaped dirigible was alternately almost on one end or the other. One man described its movements by saying that it was "cutting capers like a bucking goat trying to climb the stairs of heaven!"

It is probable that at this time the Zeppelin had been struck by a piece of shrapnel. Its movements were almost comical. The crew had great difficulty to keep any control whatever over the wild running engines, the noise of which

could be heard above the din of the firing. The separate little compartments of inflated balloons must have steadied the airship, for it righted itself and got away out of sight towards the south, although it was still "limping," if I may use that word to describe what I mean.

Of the bombs that were dropped, one fell near the railway station of Berchem; one on a building outside the town belonging to M. Kreglinger; one in Wilryck, which is a suburb of Antwerp; and two in the new public park of the "Night-ingales"—"Parc des Rossignols." About half a dozen houses were damaged and a few people, including a boy of sixteen, slightly wounded by broken glass.

That was all. Thanks to the vigilance of the forts and the searchlights the Zeppelin's venture was a failure. The bombs were thrown out not so much for the sake of doing damage as for the saving of the airship itself. The total harm done was small. The bombs that were dropped were smaller than those used at the time of the first visit, and they were loaded with brass slugs, which cause much more dangerous wounds than slugs of iron.

That is the inglorious record of the Zeppelins at Antwerp. Their cost is enormous. A fortune is spent on the construction of each. Yet they are unreliable and fair-weather craft. Personally, I do not think they are at present capable of doing anything like enough damage to have any influence on the result of the war—or even the



Antwerp. Small slugs from a Zeppelin bomb caused these holes.



result of a single battle. Their only use is to strike terror into the hearts of the people and induce them to come to terms. The results, however, have been too small to justify the Kaiser's ambition. Not every nation—least of all Belgium—has the mind and craven heart of Germany.

## CHAPTER VIII

### TAUBES

**I**N the case of Taubes—and the name, meaning “Doves,” is an irony—the Germans did better. I do not refer, of course, to bomb-dropping, although the Taubes did their share in that, but to the general usefulness of the machines. They scouted all over the country. They found out where the Belgian troops were and where the Belgian artillery was located. They circled over Antwerp in the full sunshine of noon and dropped messages to the population which were a mixture of threats and impertinences. And always they flew so high that one could not hear the slightest noise, although a trail of white smoke could be seen in the aeroplane’s wake.

I remember, as a boy in Scotland, many years ago, going out one day with a shooting party, and on that occasion I saw a contrivance that I thought was distinctly unfair. The men I was with were going to cross a turnip field in which, no doubt, were many rabbits, which would flee at the first sound of the shooters and which would have been decidedly hard to knock over when running low down in the furrows amongst the shelter of the turnip leaves.

But before the men entered amongst the turnips

they got a gamekeeper to fly a kite in such a way that it hung over the top of the field. This kite was in the form of a hawk, and to the rabbits and game underneath it certainly appeared as a huge bird of prey. Well, then, the poor things lay as still as could be lest the dreaded foe should swoop down on them and seize them in its clutches. The rest was easy. The marksmen entered the field and it was not until they were close up to their prey that the latter moved at all. Then the poor rabbit had the choice of two evils—and usually decided to make a bolt for it anyway. The men with the guns had a better chance now, for the rabbits remained within range for a much longer time than they would otherwise have done.

All this is to say that the first Taube I saw took me back across the years to that turnip field. The troops in the trenches were the rabbits; the Taube was the hawk—only in this case the Taube could see and it hovered exactly over the prey so that the German artillerymen—the men with the guns—could see where to fire without necessarily advancing into the field.

The German Military Authorities have made a point of having everything they needed made in a distinct character of its own. Their big siege guns, for instance. One might even add the marching “goose-step” of the men and their general ideas of warfare. So that in the place of aeroplanes, to continue, the Germans adopted an altogether distinctive model. They made the general shape of their flying machines so that it

was very easily detected even at a height of thousands of feet. I can imagine that they have regretted at times not having less easily distinguishable models at their disposal.

Everybody could recognise a Taube. There were posters stuck up all over Antwerp and other towns showing the Taube in its various positions. The aspect from immediately beneath was shown : the side views also ; and the various machines of the Allies were also pictured in diagrams by way of comparison. I am sure that even the children could have told which machine was German and which was not. This was a distinct advantage as far as the Belgians were concerned—but, of course, the reverse holds good. The Germans could detect an enemy aeroplane just the same. Considering how thoroughly the German plans had been prepared, it is not a little strange that they had no Belgian or French flying machine with which they could have deceived the Belgians to their own (the German) advantage.

Seen from afar, the general form of the Taube is not unlike the pigeon from which it takes its name. The ends of the wings are very much broadened on the hind part, where by means of wires the aviator can redress on one wing the canting apparatus, or can turn sharply on one wing's end with the combined aid of the rudder. The tail itself is very different from any other continental or British-made aeroplanes. It spreads out in a fan-like shape with, as in the case of the wings' ends, the edge cut out in small half-circles



so as to imitate the penned tail or wing of a dove. All the Taubes were single-decked, and although the Germans used several kinds of Taubes, they were all constructed on the same outline.

Their motors were all very powerful—between 80 and 100 h.p.—and they were nearly all well armoured in their vital spots. Nearly all the Taubes, moreover, carried only two men—the pilot in front and the observer at the back. Most of them carried bomb-dropping apparatus as well as a special contrivance with which they could let fall from beneath them bundles of between six and seven hundred little steel arrows. These were several inches in length, were very sharp, and on the feather end were grooved in such a way that they fell straight as if they were all feather-tipped like ordinary arrows. The effect of these arrows, which were thrown out in a spreading direction, would be particularly deadly to any body of troops on which they fell, as the momentum gathered by the fall from such a high distance must be tremendous. But as it happens, however, they were not much used, and any results that there were have not been as great as their inventor expected.

Taubes are difficult to hit. I have stood in the streets of Antwerp and on hotel roofs in that city and watched the shrapnel shells shot at them burst in the sky. The little clouds of smoke were always some distance off. The Taube seemed to fly as steady as ever as though the pilot were quite unconcerned. Of course, the rate of the machine's travelling, to say nothing of the great

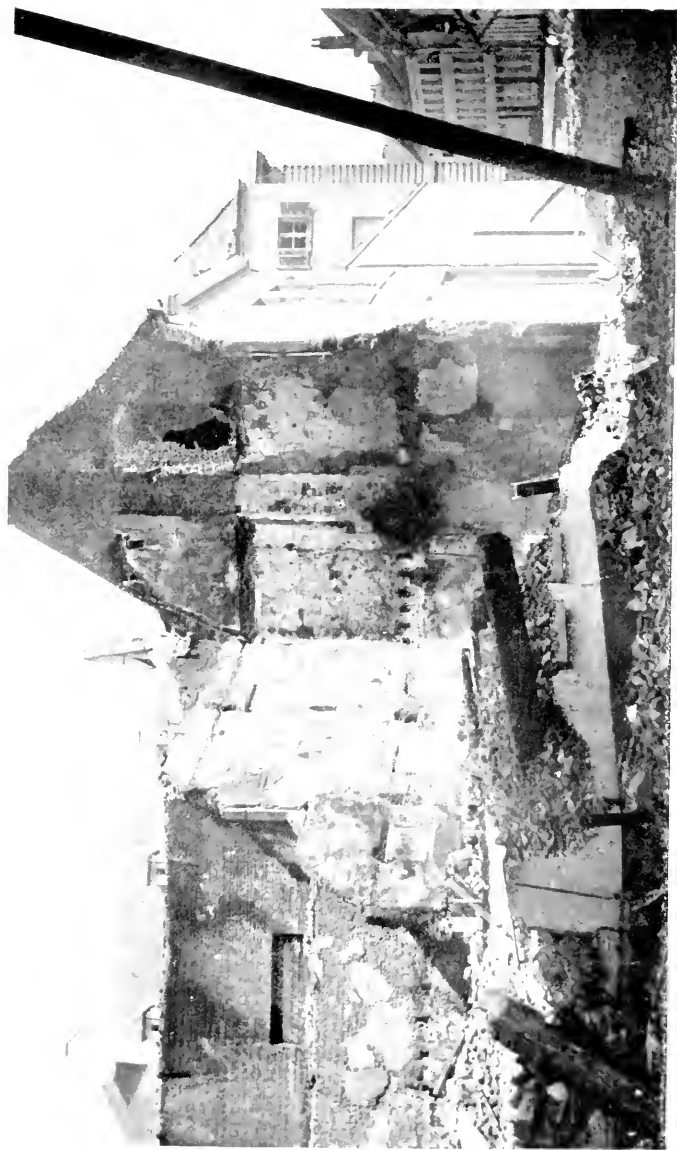
height, must have made the target a difficult one.

“It’s like trying to fetch down a wasp with an elephant gun,” said a Belgian officer to me on one of the occasional visits of a Taube to Antwerp.

I saw a Taube fly over Malines on one occasion towards the Fort of Waelhem. The guns there and at Fort Wavre Sainte Catherine, as well as the batteries in the surrounding fields, all opened fire on the aeroplane. Shrapnel shell after shrapnel shell burst all around it. But the flight was so rapid and its directions were so constantly altered as to outwit even the best and quickest of gunners.

The only thing a Taube fears is, I think, another aeroplane as strong and swift as itself. I saw a great struggle in the air during another visit of a Taube to Malines. The German machine was shot at by the guns at the forts and in the fields. Some riflemen in the Grand Place in Malines took foolish aim at the Taube, which mounted higher and higher out of range of shot and shell alike. The sky was full of shrapnel clouds and amongst these the aeroplane steered its course towards the west, almost as a submarine would amid rocks and sea mines. The Taube was just crossing the square of Margaret of Austria, when out of the south-west came two powerful Belgian flying machines—a monoplane and a two-decker—both sailing very high.

The Taube, cut from its retreat, swung round



Malines. Fire followed the explosion of a shell and destroyed this house,



on its wing and commenced to climb higher and higher into the sky. The Belgian machines, however, already at a great height, were in the best position. They soared on top of the doomed pigeon just as two eagles would have done. They then lowered themselves gently above the Taube, which again tried by sharp turns to flee from its pursuers.

It was a beautifully clear day and the spectacle of the fight between the great airbirds was magnificent. Every move could be seen. It was thrilling to a high degree. We on the ground were trembling with the excitement. Of course the guns had immediately ceased firing when the two machines came on the scene.

The Taube could be seen dropping lower and lower. Then making a dash for an opening, it headed straight for the south in the hope of being able to fly to the German lines. But the relentless pursuers followed it. The Taube by this time was less than a thousand feet high, and outside the town of Malines, in the fields near to the road to Louvain, it was compelled to land. It fell into the lines of the Belgian infantrymen. And overhead the two big albatrosses of the land went on circling round and round their fallen, captured prey as would have done the giant seabirds themselves over the dolphin they spied in the transparent blue waters of the Southern Ocean.

It was a great struggle. Friend and foe alike must have had strong hearts to stand the strain of the great dangers each underwent. A man in

a trench may be wounded and he may fall down and have to lie until help comes. But an aviator has little chance of saving his life if he or his machine is struck at all. If anything goes wrong with the vital parts of the aeroplane there is little chance for the pilot and his observer. And if anything happens to the former, and the latter is unable to manage the machine, the chances of escaping safely are equally hopeless.

I had the utmost admiration for the men in these three flying machines, and almost in my heart I had a tiny feeling of sympathy with the German, although some minutes before I was hoping with all my heart that a shell would strike his machine and send it and its crew crashing to the ground. The German especially had a great risk to run in coming over his enemy's lines. There was always the chance of a lucky shot disabling the machine or breaking it entirely. There was always the chance of a stray bullet hitting him himself. There was always the chance of his machine being set on fire—to say nothing of the dangers of the neutral wind, and the risk he ran of falling on trees or in rough country or into the enemy's camp. I am told that even a tiny grain of grit in the wrong place is sufficient to cause death and destruction of man and engine.

Close to Antwerp and just outside the outskirts of the city, at the Plaine de Wilryck, the great expanse of fine grounds formerly used for the training of the aerostatic corps, the military authorities had installed tents for the aviators

and their assistants and hangars for their machines.

There, a few days before the flying corps was removed to Ostend, I met an old friend of Albert's, one whom he had known for many years and one who has been the idol of the Antwerp public. This man was Jan Olieslagers, the "Antwerp Devil."

Olieslagers was very proud of this title, which he had gained by the really "devilish" and indifferent-to-danger way in which he had gone in for motor-cycle racing. On the motor track he had won almost every cup and prize that was ever offered, and now that he had gone in for flying he had become a new wonder in the science of aviation. He was the first man in Belgium to "loop the loop," and he has other notable achievements to his credit.

With Olieslagers we went round to the sheds and tents and saw the Belgian machines as well as the French and English single- and double-deckers which had only recently arrived and which were very much admired for their power and the big spread of their wings. It was like being in an enormous beehive. Every minute one or other of the Cyclopean bees would start to hum and deafen the little Lilliputians nearby. Then, with a slight spring, one of the aeroplanes would climb up into the sky and soar off on its important mission.

There was none of the race-meeting or exhibition feeling about the aerodrome. Pleasure flights had given place to vitally important business. Very few persons were allowed in the grounds, and stern military order prevailed everywhere.

Estafettes crossed the field ; grey-painted motor-cars with the pleasing inscription of " R.N." on them, and others with " S.M." (" Service Militaire ") placards on their wind screens, came and went in quick succession to the staff offices in the main hall of the aerodrome, which formerly housed a dirigible. Orders were issued every minute and the gigantic air machines would set off.

One of the revelations of this great war is undoubtedly the use of the modern fourth arm, without which much information which is absolutely necessary would be nearly impossible to obtain. There is, too, that hawk-like hovering over forts and troops that gives the artillerymen the range.

When I was in Dunkerque many days later than my visit to the aviation camp I met Jan Olieslagers again.



## CHAPTER I

### MALINES

TO me there has always been a sense of awe on entering an empty cathedral. The vaulted silence, perhaps; the dimness of the light; the peace and calm in which I find myself alone before the altar. Perhaps it is the sudden change from the outside world—a few steps, the opening and shutting of a thick oak door—and then a holy atmosphere in which mundane things are not.

Outside St. Rombold's Cathedral in Malines there was sunshine and light and the silence of a churchyard. Heaps of stone and brick lay around. Inside the Cathedral—Christ on His Cross above a Calvary of wreckage and desecration.

There was a little side door open. Through it and past a tattered red-cloth curtain I went, nervously and with a queer trembling at my heart. God knows what sense of awe came on me then. I only know I stood there bareheaded in a wilderness of shattered stone and wood. There was no soft dim light; no dust-laden rays spread from coloured windows to shadowy aisles. The unfiltered sunlight poured glaringly in from huge holes whose sides had once framed fine

stained glass. A soft, warm wind blew through the church. There was the freshness of the open air.

Above the mass of grey-white stone that littered the floor were broken cane chairs and fallen wood. Giant pillars were chipped and cracked. Fine carved woodwork was splintered and broken. The paved aisles were upheaved as if some huge subterranean monster had squeezed its way from underneath. Tombs were laid bare; pulpits and prayer-mats white with lime. The broken window glass had fallen on all sides. Candles and tall brass stands were bent in half. Plaster had fallen from the bruised walls. A few cigar-ends lay on the floor. . . . Amongst the ruins I saw the black paper slips from a photographer's film pack. . . .

The altar steps and rails were broken. The tarnished altar a clumsy piece of wreckage. Le Christ en Croix, impressive, awesome, holy, remained untouched in spite of shot and shell. One could only kneel before the miracle of the Crucifix.

And outside a shell whistled over the town. The Belgians at Fort Waelhem were renewing their fire.

I found the Cardinal's Palace behind the Cathedral. Inside the building the marble hall and wide white steps were glistening with broken glass. Upstairs the windows were shattered and the rooms piled with wreckage. The Palace had been converted into a Red Cross hospital. Rows



Cardinal Mercier's Palace at Malines. "The floors were piled with wreckage."



of narrow bedsteads had been prepared for the reception of wounded men. Now the iron frames were twisted and bent. The roof had crashed down upon them, piling them and the floor with heaps of stone and wood.

Outside there was a charming garden with shaggy green lawns and shrubs and a wealth of flowers. Beyond that again, amongst the thick trees, was a tiny church that might have been a little English country place of worship. Here was another contrast. Sacred pictures on a brewer's dray; the quiet, deserted town and the whistling shells; and now the wrecked room and the peaceful garden.

At the corner of the Grand Place, to the immediate south of the cathedral, was the Town Hall. A stone lion had fallen between it and the church. Two of these had formerly been placed above the door. This one had been thrown some yards away; the other had been knocked through the wall of the building into the interior.

The Grand Place at noon was empty. On three sides were shuttered cafés. Only one restaurant remained open. It was a small one on the south side. At one of the outside tables were seated some Red Cross workers and a motorcyclist dispatch bearer. The proprietor and his wife and two boys were standing beside them to hear the news. Albert was there also, his cheery presence dispelling most of the patron's fears. When I walked up he grinned happily.

"Did you hear the music?" he asked.

And in case I hadn't, another boom came from Waelhem, and another shell went whistling overhead. Gunfire was always "music" to Albert. The big drums at the fort, the whistles and giant flutes in the sky, and, later on, when we followed in the wake of mitrailleuse cars, the purring kettledrums of quick-firing guns. The "music" was the orchestra of Death.

We lunched at the little restaurant, and had our coffee and cigars in spite of all. Then we went to one of the hospitals and took wounded men from there to Antwerp. We had no more work to do that day, but after dinner, when the lights had gone out and only the moon—which knew naught of martial law and cared less for Zeppelins—continued to shine, we had a queer hankering after adventure and excitement, so we got the motor-car and set off at half-past nine for Malines once more. Through the silent streets of Antwerp, past the sentries and on through the Porte de Berchem, which had to be opened for us before we could pass, then through Vieux-Dieu, Contich, Waelhem, and on to Malines.

I remember that the password that night was "Elisabeth." I also remember that I was told frequently to "look aloft" into the clear moonlit sky in case a Zeppelin should pass our way. One little incident happened on the journey. Between Waelhem and Malines—just before we got to the bridge across the river Dyle—a sentry signalled to us to stop. He stood across the

road in the limelight of our head-lamps with his rifle held in both hands across his body. Albert slowed down, whispered "Elisabeth" to him, and then accelerated his speed. Suddenly there was a shout and the sharp snap of steel on steel. The sentry raised his rifle to his shoulder and would have fired on us had not Albert applied his brakes so suddenly as to stop the car in its own length.

"Elisabeth," Albert shouted back, a little annoyed at what might easily have proved a fatality.

"Bien," said the sentry.

We restarted—but had not gone twenty yards before an officer stopped us and demanded angrily why we had given the password so loudly as to let all the neighbourhood know what it was!

I was somewhat surprised at Albert, who was usually so very careful, having shouted the password so indiscreetly, but he explained to me, without being asked, that he did not want to be killed in the same way as the Baron van Zuylen de Nyevelde had been. The Baron in the beginning of the war had neglected to give the password loud enough when he was passing a sentry in his car, or perhaps it had been that the noise of the motor had prevented the word being heard, but as it happened, the sentry fired at once and shot him dead. Of course, the sentry had only done his duty and no blame could be attached to him for the occurrence.

We drove into Malines at half-past ten. Outside the old Hall of Margaret of Austria, at the east side of the Grand Place, we stopped our car and got out. Then followed some hours of what might have been a comic opera.

Part of the old Hall was being used as a temporary police-station. The door was open, showing a dim, lantern-lit interior. On little stools, and on the front doorstep itself, a number of men sat outside. Some of these were the local police in civilian dress, some wore bowlers, some caps, some were bareheaded; a few stray peasants had joined them. Some of the men sat in their shirtsleeves; all of them were smoking pipes. We were welcomed in Flemish, of which I know no words. Stools were brought for us, so we joined the circle around the open door.

So there we were, a merry little party, but we spoke in whispers for all that. Sometimes we would hear the clatter of horses' hoofs in one of the side streets and a little patrolling band of cavalry would ride past us. Perhaps a motor-cyclist would rattle past towards Antwerp, or an ordinary mounted cyclist would pedal his way slowly by. But these interruptions were few—and only the clatter of hoofs aroused any anxiety.

There was no place in the town at which we could stay, so we decided to put up the hood and spend the night in the car. It was, however, somewhat chilly, so we asked the police if we might sleep in the gaol instead. To this they agreed. Then one of the policemen decided





Captain de Keersmaecker drinking a toast out of a German shell.



that something ought to be done to treat us hospitably. So he got the keys of one of the local breweries, which had been entrusted to the care of the police, and set off with an enormous enamelled iron ewer to fetch some beer. We had only one glass to drink from, but when the policeman returned, staggering under the weight of the huge can, we made a loving-cup of the tumbler and passed it round the circle. Another policeman went for more beer : each man, indeed, had his turn to go to the brewery, and when Albert and I finally retired for the night the journeys round the corner for beer were still continuing.

The gaol had been partly destroyed by shell-fire. So it was in the Reception Chamber of Margaret of Austria that we passed the night. This was really a huge barn-like room. Its windows and door were broken and a cold draught went through the place. It was dark, too, but with the aid of an oil lantern which one of our hosts held for us, we found a heap of straw, on which we lay down and fell asleep.

At four o'clock in the morning, for some reason or other, we were awakened by one of the policemen.

"Quatre heures, messieurs," said he.

So we fell asleep again. But an hour and a half later the guns from Waelhem woke us up. And we found we were not alone in the room. Sundry rustlings in the straw around us were explained by the presence of two young girl pris-

oners (they had run away from a convent, and had really been arrested for their own safety), three tramps, and, in a distant corner, another prisoner. This last man had been arrested for pillage. The courtyard on which the room opened was shut off from the outside streets by a big gate, so escape was really impossible in spite of the wrecked condition of the prison.

We went out and found it was another splendid morning. And we were hungry, so we walked across to the restaurant where we had lunched the previous day to find out whether the proprietor was still there or if he had gone away as he told us the day before he meant to do.

"We'll get him to come down and let us in," I said. "Then we'll see what we can have for breakfast."

"People don't come down in bombarded towns," said Albert.

When we reached the café he knelt on the pavement and shouted through the iron grating above the cellar. And sure enough a frightened voice replied! The patron and his family had converted the cellar into a bedroom. He came up a few minutes later and opened the door for us, looking tremendously relieved to find that the Germans had not yet arrived in the town.

An excellent breakfast we had: ham and eggs and toast and fine hot coffee. I thought of the two young girls, so we ordered two more large cups of coffee, and Albert and I went over to the Hall, through the front office past a few



A wounded Belgian soldier lay down and died.



"A German bayonet had pierced the old man a few inches from his heart."



sleepy policemen, and into the prison where the girls were. We gave them the coffee, and some time later on returned for the empty cups. The police said nothing to us.

We left Malines two hours later, and set off in the direction of Sempst, where for some time the German advance had been checked. We had not gone far, however—in fact, we had just crossed the bridge over the Battel canal on the outskirts of the town—when we came across a wounded peasant. He had been in the fields near his house when some German soldiers had seen him. They had then crossed the fields to where he was and had struck him down with a bayonet thrust. We took him back to Malines at once, and in the same café in which we had had breakfast we had his wounds attended to by two Red Cross ambulanciers who happened to be having coffee in the café at the time we arrived.

The old man, we found, had been pierced by a bayonet a few inches from his heart. This had happened several days before, and up to the time we met him nothing had been done in the way of dressing his wound. In spite of that, however, he recovered sufficiently after he had been bandaged to proceed on his way to Antwerp. I will never forget how he walked bravely off in his corduroy suit as though nothing whatever had happened to him.

We set off again along the road to Sempst.

## CHAPTER X

### SEMPST

OVER the canal, along by the side of the road that ran to Brussels, were standing long rows of cavalry horses. The men themselves, tired out after a night spent in patrolling the surrounding fields and roads, lay asleep on the banks of the ditches on either side. A few officers stood in a group studying a large map. We heard from them that it was unsafe to go far along the road.

We went cautiously on until we came to where a Belgian colonel was directing his troops from the top of a railway banking. One of the officers with him signalled for us to stop, so we did so, and Albert went on foot up the sandy embankment towards him. He asked who we were and what we were doing and demanded our papers, so Albert called on me to come up also. The colonel examined our passports, then told us of the events of the past night, and said that we could go with safety as far as the Château Grisar, which stood a few hundred yards further off on the road to Sempst. He also pointed out to us, on the other side of the line some distance off, the Château van der Linden, which, at that moment, was in the hands of the Germans. All this time



the battle was raging. We heard the snap of rifles, and could even hear the whizzing of the bullets that passed us. Down in front of us, away below the embankment on which we stood, we could see the German fire in Hofstade. Some buildings were burning. White and grey-black smoke was rising from them. And the colonel, a charming, tall, elderly man, stood there bare-headed, almost unconcernedly.

We left him and went off as far as the Château Grisar, which stood amongst trees at a corner of the road. The Germans had been driven out of the house the previous day, and now when we reached it we found that the windows and doors had been smashed, the flower-beds trampled down, and the trees and shrubs broken in the fierce fight that had taken place. There was no sign of life about the villa with the exception of a small dog that stood at the iron gates of the property and barked loudly at our approach.

We stopped there for some time, then turned the car and were about to proceed back towards Malines when we heard a motor-cyclist coming up behind us. He shouted and waved his arm to us to stop. Without slowing down more than a very little, he called out that there were two wounded officers further along the road, and asked us to go for them, then hastened on his way to the back of the lines for the military ambulances.

We turned the car at once and hurried off along the road. All of a sudden we reached the actual scene of battle. In the centre of the road, on a

wheelbarrow, a Belgian soldier lay badly wounded. Around the barrow was a broadening pool of blood; the straw on which the man lay was drenched red. By the side of the road lay another man, a lieutenant, with a bullet hole in his right thigh. And lying in the cover of the ditches and behind trees were a few Belgian soldiers, who had been holding on to the position until help came for the two wounded. There were dead horses near at hand and many more wounded men in the fields.

We immediately got out a stretcher, placed the first man on it, and got it placed athwart the car. Then we lifted the other man into the front seat and hurried off. But before we had done so, just before we had the second man in the car, the commander who held this point of the embankment gave the order to retreat, so that we were the last to leave the scene. Over the railway line—barely a hundred yards away—were the Germans. A minute later they swarmed over the bank to where we had been—a grey avalanche of fighting men. We heard a few stray rifle shots, but we were off at ninety kilometres an hour out of their range. I stood at the back of the car beside the man on the stretcher. His face was the colour of tobacco ash. His lips were bloodless. He was so terribly wounded that he was rapidly bleeding to death.

But he spoke in English to me of the weather, of the progress of the Allies in France, and how he had been at an English university. Never a

word about the agony he was suffering. His life's blood was dripping to the floor through the thick canvas of the stretcher. . . .

And the man in front was saying to Albert: "Quicker—quicker. Mon pauvre frère. Never mind me—but save my brother."

"How long have I got?" said the man next me.

For a second I hesitated, but it was sufficient.

"I'm not afraid to die," he said to me calmly, noting my hesitation. "Do you think an hour?"

"An hour, perhaps," I said.

Then he closed his eyes for a time while the car, running along at a great speed, jumped and bumped its way over the paved road. Yet he never made a sound. Once or twice he bit his lip and I fancied I heard a quick short intake of breath, but that was all.

And that is how we came to Malines with the Baron del Marmol and his brother.

In the dépôt of the Red Cross Field Service at the outskirts of the town we heard the story. When war commenced the younger brother had volunteered at once and had gone as a private in the company in which the Baron was a lieutenant. In the battle along the Sempst road the younger man had fallen. The elder tried to save him, but was himself injured. Then we reached them and had taken them off.

Outside the hospital near the canal a little crowd had gathered. A few women were there and some soldiers who had come along from the

guard of the bridge, and an old man or two. They watched us carry in the men. They watched Albert come out and go off hurriedly in his car. And a hush fell over them when he returned with a tall, sad-faced priest, whom he had found at a church in Neckerspoel, some distance away.

Extreme Unction was administered to the younger brother, who had remained conscious all this time. Then chloroform was given and the doctors were about to operate on the slight chance of being able to save his life. But he regained consciousness before they had begun.

"Leave me, leave me," he said. "I am so tired."

More chloroform—under which he died some minutes later. He had seventeen tears in his intestines. . . . We told the Baron. At first he wept. "But it's the finest death a man can die," said he, and there was a ring of pride in his voice. Outside the ward, in a corner of the corridor, I found an ambulancier weeping bitterly. Men cry seldom, even in time of war.

We left the hospital, but returned later in the day and took the Baron del Marmol, a lieutenant in the Chasseurs à Cheval, back to Antwerp.

When we left the hospital we went through the town to the little café in the Grand Place. There we found that we could have as much to drink as we liked, but no food. And just as we had been told that, an elderly man in black clothes came across the square towards us. I had seen him at the hospital not long before. He was the

*beadau* of the Church of St. John and had come along with the curé of Neckerspoel to help him in his administration of the sacrament to the dying man.

Now he came forward and asked us if we would honour him by having lunch at his house. He apologised for what he told us would be a humble meal, but we thanked him and accepted his invitation gratefully. He asked us if we would go to his house in five minutes' time, then he set off towards it by himself. We followed some minutes later and reached the street he lived in just before he himself had got to his house door. We saw him in front of us, hurrying along the pavement with a parcel under his arm. This, as it happened, contained some bread which he had managed to secure after he left us.

He lived behind a little general shop, through which we had to pass to a cheerless little kitchen at the back. He placed chairs for us, lit a stove, then began to fry some bacon. After a time he had cooked sufficient for our meal, so he placed it in front of us, cut up the loaf and served us. He also went and got a bottle of red wine for us to drink. But he wouldn't join in the meal. He waited until we were finished. The bacon we had was, I think, the worst I have ever tasted, and yet it was the best. It was fat and salt and most unappetising. Albert found it the same. It was with difficulty that he swallowed it at all. But we each took a second helping and declared that it was excellent.

The man's womenfolk had gone off when the first bombardment commenced. Now he lived alone. He was his own cook, his own servant, his own scullery man. A lonely, elderly man, in a pathetic black suit of shiny, threadbare material. He wore clumsy black slippers instead of boots. His little kitchen sadly needed the touch of a woman's hand.

But kindly and hospitable and charitable—he was all of these.

“That's a good man,” said Albert to me as we drove off. And the poor chap was quite upset because some days before he had spoken slightly crossly to our late host.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE CROIX ROUGE

I WENT on September 10th to the Hospital Militaire in the Avenue Marie in Antwerp. This hospital is the chief one in the city, and it is almost as difficult to pass its big iron gates as it is to enter any of the forts around the town, so careful are the authorities for the welfare of their patients.

The officer in charge, General Stainforth, showed me over the various buildings and took me through the various wards. He was an elderly, grey-haired man, kindly and courteous, and very sympathetic towards the wounded men.

After we had talked with many injured Belgians, we came to a special building in which there were a number of wounded Germans; none of them was seriously hurt. We passed the armed sentries at the door and had just entered the main ward when another wounded German was brought in on a stretcher. This is what happened.

General Stainforth himself immediately went to the man's assistance. He himself helped the priest and the nun to lift the man on to a bed. He himself helped to undress him. "Le pauvre!" he said, "le pauvre!" and begged the attendants to be very gentle, although that was unnecessary.

And it was General Stainforth himself who was the first to reach out his hand before the nurse could and take a sponge and bathe the injured breast of the enemy's wounded soldier.

That is a sidelight on the Belgian spirit—but here is what also happened. It was the meal hour of the wounded Germans when we reached their ward. They were sitting up in bed, all of them, with basins of thick potato soup and large glasses of beer, and not a man in that room stopped eating, pig-like, and not a man in that room raised his eyes from his food to look at his wounded comrades. At the risk of appearing to be prejudiced, I say candidly that the faces of those German soldiers were dull, stupid, brutal.

A day or two before my visit, King Albert had himself gone to the Hospital Militaire to see his wounded soldiers. After he had gone through all the wards, chatting to the wounded Belgians and inquiring after their welfare, he reached the building where the German wounded lay. He walked through the wards, asking kindly after the men, and seeing for himself that they were well treated.

When the King had gone, one of the Sisters of Mercy in attendance on the injured Germans told them that the tall officer was the King of the Belgians.

They laughed at her. "The King is dead!" they exclaimed. "You needn't try to deceive us."

That is only one of the many lies the German troops have been told. Another one was that





The wounded German whom General Stainforth attended.



Holes caused by a Zeppelin bomb in the grounds of the Hospital Sainte Elisabeth, Antwerp.

*Facing page 126.*



Liège was Paris. The Germans who entered the town asked each other where the Eiffel Tower was ! And there are still others too numerous to mention.

In the grounds of the hospital were many convalescent men. Some of them hobbled along the gravelled walks on crutches, others sat in chairs, and many of them lay on the grass. Card-playing was a favourite occupation. Many groups of bandaged men sat playing at all manner of weird games. I joined two men and played with them for a time. I was under the impression that the game they were playing was "nap," but it was really some unknown game of which I was ignorant, so the result was somewhat confusing. Card-playing went on in the wards also. Two convalescent men would join two men in adjacent beds and form a quartet.

Officers' wives distributed cigarettes to the men every day. When the ladies appeared in the hospital grounds the soldiers used to swarm round them. It was amusing to see how quickly men on crutches could travel to reach the distribution before it gave out.

It would require a Kingsley to write in praise of cigarettes. They are wonderful. I have seen wounded men come off the battlefield suffering agonies of pain. I have offered them a cigarette, and they have all accepted gratefully and got comfort from their smoke. No man was too ill to smoke. I swear that many men recovered strength from a cigarette.

A cigarette during a lull in the fighting was as good as a pick-me-up. It was a tonic to tired men. Food? Never mind a shortage of food: give each man a cigarette! Reduce the rations if you like, but send along a cigarette or two as compensation! I've seen men with heads bandaged so that their faces were almost covered up sit with a cigarette sticking out from amongst the lint. I've seen a gleam of content come into their eyes the moment they had "lit up." The contrast between the clean, white cigarette and the dirty, battle-grimed faces of the soldiers was striking.

I know many cases where men have declined anæsthetics before being operated upon. They asked for a cigarette instead. Chloroform and unconsciousness were not so good as a cigarette and the knowledge of smoking it. One man I know of had his arm so badly torn by a fragment of shell that the muscles and nerves were laid bare. When the wound was dressed the touching of the exposed nerves caused excruciating pain. The doctors offered to give the man an anæsthetic before attending to his arm. He refused. It was not necessary, he said. He asked that he might be allowed to smoke instead. One of the doctors gave him a cigar, and lit it for him. Then they proceeded to dress his wound. They had not long commenced to do so than the cigar fell out of the soldier's mouth. Owing to the terrible pain he suffered he had clenched his teeth so that he had bitten the cigar clean through. They

gave him three cigars in all. Each one met the same fate. It was not until the arm had been bound up again that the man was able to smoke without losing his cigar.

Cigarettes are wonderful. Not only are they the first thing a man asks for on coming away from the battlefield, but they are also the last things he has before entering the fight. Many, many times I've seen men march off to battle. I've seen them only half a mile from the bullet-swept trenches, marching quietly and confidently on—some to their death, some to their crippling, some to the horrors of mental and physical pain—and nearly every man smoked. Some had pipes, and some cigars, but the majority had cigarettes only. Belgium, you must know, is a land of smokers.

So here the men were with their cheering cigarettes, blowing away part of their troubles with each puff of smoke.

Priests and nuns acted as attendants to the wounded men. One cannot praise their work enough. Not only in Antwerp but on the battlefield itself one found these priests tending to the wounded of both sides. Almost every little village convent was used as a hospital. The Sisters of Mercy and the nuns did magnificent work for friend and foe alike, and in connection with this, and bearing in mind the treatment of the wounded Germans that I have mentioned, the attitude of the enemy towards the Belgian Red Cross and towards the Belgian wounded forms a striking contrast.

Belgian officers and soldiers have proved beyond all question of doubt that German soldiers did not hesitate to display either the white or the Red Cross flag in order to approach the Belgian troops with impunity. And the Germans have fired on Belgian ambulances and have killed or ill-treated the Red Cross men. They maltreated and even killed the wounded. The clergy, it would seem, were particularly chosen as subjects for German brutality, and the treatment of the splendid Sisters of Mercy and nuns by the Kaiser's soldiers is so terrible as to be indescribable.

Another thing that I must mention here is this : So careful were the Belgian authorities with the wounded soldiers of the enemy that there actually was a transport regulation to ensure that no man should be removed from a local to the main hospital if there were any danger whatever of the journey having any bad effects on his condition.

Another hospital I went through in Antwerp was the Hospital Sainte Elisabeth. The majority of the patients here are, as a rule, women, but now there were many soldiers in the wards and in the grounds, as well as in the Botanical Gardens which adjoined.

In one of the upstairs wards were a number of women who had been injured by the bombs dropped by the first Zeppelin. There was also in another part of the building a policeman whose right leg had been cut off by a piece of bomb. The women were not seriously hurt, although they had had narrow escapes. One woman, a doctor's

servant, had been in bed with her sister at the time of the bomb's explosion. The sister had been killed.

One woman was in bed with a broken leg. I asked her how it happened, and she answered one word, "Zeppelin."

But I was interested. I wondered if it were possible for a piece of bomb to break a bone without cutting the limb right off, so I asked her further questions on the matter. Had a piece of bomb struck her, or had she been struck with a piece of falling stone, or had her house collapsed in such a way that she was thrown some distance down amongst the debris?

She was somewhat confused at my questions, but finally she told me, with a blush, exactly what had happened. She had, it appears, been at the head of the stairs in her house when one of the bombs fell in a neighbouring street. She got such a fright that she fell downstairs and broke her leg. Her house was not even chipped! Still, she blamed the Zeppelin, and, I suppose, rightly.

The German wounded in the Hospital Militaire were, of course, prisoners. But there were many unwounded Germans captured and brought to Antwerp, *en route* to all manner of rumoured destinations. Some reports said that they were all being taken to a great fortress in the North African desert; others that they were all going to be imprisoned in England; and France and the Channel Islands were also mentioned as probable "journey's ends."

I saw many German prisoners arrive at the Central Station. As a rule they were placed in covered conveyances before being taken to prison. The crowd would crane its neck to catch a glimpse of them. Then, as the men were driven off, an angry moan would come from the people—groaning that swelled up in intensity until it was as the roar of a huge lion.

For myself, the first sight of the Germans was a curious experience. As the miserable-looking, white-faced, close-cropped men passed by I found myself looking at them almost apathetically. Then there came to me much the same interested curiosity as comes to one on viewing a strange beast in a menagerie. The Germans, up till then, had been an unseen foe against whom we hurled our shells—a mere name against which we sent forth our hate. As far as I was concerned, there was something uncanny about the enemy. I hardly thought of them as flesh and blood. It was incredible that the miserable captured men who passed by me were units of the gigantic hostile force.

“So these,” I thought to myself, “these are the Germans. These are the beasts who have ravaged the whole country. These are the soldiers against whom our guns are fired.”

It was difficult to look upon them as men. It was hard to realise that we were all human beings. The “unknown quantity” idea remained in one’s mind. I will make a strange confession here. It is a thing I cannot account for. In the weeks that followed my first sight of Germans at close



quarters, I saw many, many German wounded and many, many German dead. Some of the wounded brought forth a "Poor devil!" from me but the dead left me absolutely unmoved. I've walked amongst the fallen bodies—not from deliberate choice, but because it was often necessary to pass them to reach the point I wished—and not even the faintest emotion has possessed me. I might just as well have walked past dead rats for all the feelings I had on the matter. That is a curious confession, but there it is. I think it is because the fallen, inanimate bodies were simply part of the inanimate name that one was fighting, and not dead men at all.

Many interesting things occurred in connection with the German prisoners. A number of them arrived one day at the Central Station. It was warm. They asked for something to drink. Their guards brought them water.

"We don't want water. We want beer," said the prisoners.

They refused to drink the water—so they got nothing at all.

On another occasion there occurred an incident worthy of comic opera. A little band of Belgians brought a little band of Germans into Antwerp. The crowd groaned at the prisoners. They shouted—well, unkind remarks at them. They would even have struck the hated foe had there been a chance of doing so.

But the little band of Belgian soldiers protested at the crowd's attitude.

“Don’t treat them like that,” said the Belgians. “Be kind to them—they were very kind to us.”

Somehow or other the Belgians who had been captured by the Germans managed to turn the tables on them !

German officers objected to being placed in prison with their men. They demanded separate quarters—which were not granted. They demanded the best food—which they were allowed to have by paying for it. At this the people shouted out objections. I use the word “demanded.” It is only another instance of the colossal insolence of the Hun.

## CHAPTER XII

### AERSCHOT

ON Friday, September 11, we went by way of Lierre to Aerschot.

For some time the Belgian soldiers had been engaged in offensive operations which took them rapidly in the direction of Louvain. On the morning of September 10 the Germans were driven out of Aerschot. The Belgian troops had passed through the town without stopping there, and so it came about that when we followed on their heels, we found the town in exactly the same condition as that in which the German soldiers had left it some hours before. The public services had not yet been reorganised. The inhabitants of the town had not yet returned to their homes. Many of them never did go back, as a matter of fact. The horrors they had witnessed had driven them off for all time.

On the outskirts of Aerschot, on the Lierre road, before we came to the bridge across the Démer, are many cottages belonging to peasants and small farmers. These houses border both sides of the road. We found that without a single exception every building had been set on fire and burned to the ground. The outhouses also had been destroyed. Barns and stables and

cow-sheds and hen-houses and coops had all been burnt. Nothing whatever was spared. There was ample evidence that the work of destruction had been hastened by the appliance of inflammatory materials. These had been spread in such a way that the flames ran along the ground from one building to another, devouring plants and crops and hedges and fruit trees in a radius of about fifty yards from the burnt houses themselves.

Across the bridge, at the scene of a fierce encounter between the Belgian and German armies about three weeks before, when the Belgians were forced on account of overwhelming odds to retreat towards Antwerp, we found that many other houses had also been destroyed. The bullets from quick-firing guns had riddled the walls. The plaster was deeply indented with shot.

We proceeded past these houses, then, turning to the right, passed down a narrow, winding street towards the Place du Marché. So many stones and heaps of broken plaster and bricks had fallen on either side of the narrow street that the passage for the motor-car was rendered very difficult. We rolled along like a ship in a storm. The wheels rose high over the heaps of wreckage—first at the right side and then at the left—so that we received constant bumps and jolts at every yard. The houses on both sides were burnt down. The flames had run up the little narrow side streets also, so that they had been destroyed as well. In many cases nothing

but the four bare walls remained. These stood up blackened with smoke, framing the awful debris within.

A strong wind was blowing, scattering a cloud of powdered plaster and soot about. Broken glass also tinkled as it was swept through the streets by the gale. Broken telegraph and telephone wires hung down in great loops. Loose stones tumbled down from the top of crumbling walls at intervals. We never knew but what one might have fallen our way.

All through the town we found wrecked houses. Many of them had been destroyed by fire ; many of them bore traces of heavy rifle shooting. Flattened bullets and empty cartridge-cases lay about in great numbers. There were empty ration tins also and all the usual litter that lies in an army's wake. I was told that much of the rifle shooting in the town had been the result of a panic caused by drunken German soldiers on the night of the Belgian army's retreat.

In their occupation of Aerschot the Germans had, of course, wrecked the church. Wrecked churches were always to be found in the towns and villages where the German soldiers had been, just as murdered peasants and mutilated women and children lay everywhere in the track of the enemy's advance. In Aerschot the great front door of the church had been burst open by dynamite. The red ironstone steps had been torn up and broken at both sides of the door-posts. Inside the church we found things in a dreadful

state. On the left-hand side as we entered we found a little altar which had been destroyed. On the top of this on each side of the altar had stood two wooden saints which had been dressed in costly gaudy raiment. Against these the Germans had heaped chairs, and had then poured paraffin or other inflammatory materials around and set fire to the whole lot. The main altar also was burnt down. The confessionals, pulpits, harmonium, and candlesticks had all been smashed. The offertory boxes had been burst open and robbed. The wooden statues of saints around the pillars of the nave had either been broken up or burnt. Empty wine bottles littered the floor around the main altar. The whole church floor was covered with hay and straw, on which the inhabitants of the town had lain during the days on which so many of them were kept as prisoners in the church.

On one side of the church was the vestry. The door was broken down. We went inside. Empty wine bottles lay in great numbers in every corner. On a shelf on our left as we entered and on the floor itself was a quantity of women's clothes: cheap furs such as the peasant women wear, and skirts and underclothes. The latter were blood-stained.

We went out into the open air again. At the side of the church was a row of small cottages leading up to the vicarage. The windows and doors of these cottages had been smashed in with the butts of rifles. In one of the cottages which

we entered we found in a corner of the floor the badly burnt body of a dead man. The cottage itself had not been fired. Probably the poor man had been burnt elsewhere and had managed to crawl into the house for safety. But of that one can only guess.

By a narrow, winding, steep path, not far from the church, we climbed up to the top of the hill towards the Tower of Beaulieu. On our way up we passed inside a wall surrounding a rather big building. Here we came across some rotting bodies of sheep which had been killed and left there by the retreating Germans. After a stiff climb we found ourselves at the top, near some Belgian sentries who were posted there to watch the surrounding country. Next to us was the Tower, which is an old ruined relic of bygone days.

From the top of this steep hill we had a splendid view of all the country round about. On our left, away towards the south, was Louvain. We could see the remaining towers and spires of the ruined city. At the bottom of the hill was the railway station, with its numerous lines stretching far and wide. (Aerschot was an important junction of many railway lines.) On our right, the road to Lierre, and on the same level with us the church spire, on the top of which we saw Belgian soldiers watching the retreat of the Germans towards Louvain and the Belgian artillery and infantry in pursuit.

Near the tower, in a potato-field, were several graves freshly dug. Belgian and German dead

were buried there. Near the track to Lierre, close to the embankment, the Belgians had dug a grave for the body of a German general, whom they had buried without any ceremony.

On the way to Gelrode, a village that lies between Aerschot and Louvain, we found at the foot of the hill the ruins of other little farms and villas and country houses. Near here, outside the town, is the field in which Burgomaster Tielemans, his brother and his son, as well as many other inhabitants of the town, were murdered by the Germans. The story of this crime is a terrible one.

During the German occupation of the town, one of their officers, they declared, had been killed by a civilian. They put the blame on the fifteen-year-old son of the Burgomaster, Emile Tielemans. They arrested the boy, his father and his uncle, as well as nearly a hundred other men. The three 'Tielemans' were bound with their hands tied behind their backs and, half covered with straw and with their heads resting on knapsacks, had to spend their last night in the street. Near them were the other prisoners, all closely guarded.

The long, miserable night of torture gave way to a grey dawn, but not until many weary hours of pain had passed. The German *soldatesque* kept up a constant attack of tormenting their poor victims. Even up to the very last moment they seemed to find a great satisfaction in martyrising the wretched men. They jeered at them;



they abused them in the foulest language. The flow of torture was unceasing. One brutal Teuton crawled stealthily towards the Burgomaster and struck him a sudden blow on the head so that he forced the helpless man's bowler hat down over his eyes and face. Then he laughed at M. Tielemans' discomfiture and insulted him in vulgar language.

The German officers had spent the night in the house of a farmer named Stockmans. When morning came several lieutenants came out of the house and went towards the captives. Emile Tielemans recognised one of these men and called to him, addressing him by his name. The lieutenant, surprised to find that one of the prisoners knew him, turned round in wonder and noticed Tielemans, whom he, in turn, recognised. He went over to him and asked politely what he wanted.

"Lieutenant Wolff," said the Burgomaster, "I am addressing you because some dreadful mistake, I believe, has been made. These prisoners here are going to be shot without a single word having been said in their defence. I also am sentenced to death without a word having been heard in my favour.

"You have dined at my table. You were with me at my house all day yesterday, and you were talking to me at the very moment that your soldiers commenced to shout, 'Man hat geschossen!' ('Somebody has been shooting.') You know that I have done no wrong, and you, and you alone, can prove that I am innocent and that I have

been made a prisoner and condemned to death without any show of justice."

Lieutenant Wolff, his face grave, calmly acknowledged that what the Burgomaster said was the truth. For a minute he remained silent and then said, "I know all that, M. Tielemans. When the moment comes for me to do so, I will be a witness in your defence."

Emile Tielemans was somewhat reassured by the officer's words, but not content with having, as he thought, saved his own life, he tried to have the other men reprieved also.

"You see here my son and my brother, Lieutenant Wolff," he said, "and also many of our fellow-citizens. I ask them to state what harm my son and my brother have done."

To this the lieutenant did not answer. He stood looking very grave and serious, but remained silent. The prisoners were told that they were to be shot. On this announcement being made, the Burgomaster addressed the soldiers who were standing near him.

"How can you say we fired on you, as you know that none of us were armed?"

A big Westphalian yelled at him, "Shut up, schweinhund! Your son shot our general and your cellar was full of bombs."

This statement was so utterly absurd that Emile Tielemans did not reply. The idea of his cellar having contained bombs was ridiculous. Any of the German officers could have seen for themselves the falsity of the statement. And

Tielemans and all the other prisoners knew that his delicate, over-grown boy was quite unable to handle a revolver even if he had one. For a time no one spoke. The fear of death crept into the souls of all the wretched captives.

Amongst them was an old man with beautiful white hair and a fine calm face. He struggled slowly to his feet, and in an impassioned speech he told of all the good the brothers Tielemans had done for Aerschot. He told of many little acts of kindness and spoke of how they had done everything to keep the population calm on the arrival of the Germans. The fine old fellow pleaded not for his own life, because he was old and the evening of his days had come, but for the two brothers whose faithful follower he was, and for the young boy.

But his words were of no avail. The soldiers laughed at the poor Belgians, bound and helpless, at the mercy of a thousand armed men.

“Generosity!” said one of the citizens of Aerschot whose life was saved. “Do the Germans know the name of that virtue? No—the brutes could not look upon us as poor inoffensive wrecks but as miserable human beings only fit to be shot!”

The German officers retired into the house of M. Stockmans to discuss further the fate of the prisoners. Their conference did not last long. In a few minutes they came out again, but Lieutenant Wolff was not with them. His interference had probably been of no use, and on his

failing to save the lives of those whom he knew to be innocent, he was not willing to witness their death.

An officer of high rank went forward towards the three Tielemans and spoke a few words to the soldiers who were mounting guard over them. The three of them were then ordered to march forward towards the place where they were to be executed. Burgomaster Tielemans pleaded with the high officer for the last time, in a loving endeavour to save the life of his boy.

“If we are all condemned to die, spare at least the life of my son, for the sake of my wife and my mother!”

The officer ignored the Burgomaster's words, which were the last that his fellow-citizens, to whom he had been devoted, heard him speak. And then he passed from them, a brave citizen to the last.

The three Tielemans' were marched off in silence between the soldiers who were about to murder them. The two men and the boy held themselves erect as they walked, their faces almost stoical, resigned to their fate. And the other prisoners, who were awaiting the same order to march on to the same fate, watched them go.

When the soldiers had gone a few hundred yards towards the foot of the hill on which is a large château, they stopped and arranged themselves in a half-circle around their victims, who knelt on the ground and awaited death bravely. An under-officer, sword [in hand, waited until the

soldiers were ready. There was a short command, the raising of a sword, the report of rifles, and then the bodies of three murdered citizens fell on each other in a heap. The officer went to where the confused mass lay and with his foot separated one body from another to see whether there were any signs of life. The boy's body moved slightly. The officer drew his revolver. . . . The three bodies were then all lifeless.

The other prisoners were marched off to be shot. They were lined up and the soldiers were about to fire, when the officers did a strange thing. They took two-thirds of the doomed men away. Every third man only was left, and then shot dead.

On the same day that we were in Aerschot, M. Pierre Orts, Conseiller de Légation de Belgique, also visited the town, although, strange to say, I did not see him. On his return to Antwerp, M. Orts wrote a statement of his visit, a copy of which he gave me. In this report, M. Orts says :—

“After several researches when we arrived in Aerschot we found at the foot of a slope the place where the innocent victims of the Germans' fury fell. Blackened pools of blood in the stubble still marked the place where each man had stood under the fire of the execution party. These bloody traces were from two to three metres distant from one another, which confirms the statement of witnesses that at the last moment the executioners took out from the ranks of the

doomed men two out of every three: Fate playing the rôle of Justice!

"A few yards away the earth had been freshly turned. A humble wooden cross, roughly and furtively made by friendly hands, marked the spot where the bodies of the twenty-seven victims lay. The grave was only partially filled. It seemed to wait for new-comers.

"Near to the church we also saw more graves of civilians who had been killed during the stay of the Germans, but in this town which had been abandoned by its population it is difficult to ascertain the exact number of the inhabitants of Aerschot who were killed."

We ourselves saw the blackened blood pools and the rude cross and the grave of murdered men, and as we went back through the wrecked streets of the town we suddenly found them alive with the passage of troops, who were on their way to avenge the crimes of the Prussian brutes. For the first time I noticed that the faces of the Belgian soldiers were hard and stern. Other times I have seen them go to battle with a smiling face and a wonderful brave cheerfulness.

"Bonne chance!" I have shouted to them, and always has come an answering "Merci, monsieur. Pareillement!"

But now when we stood aside to watch them pass, we said no word. Their faces were stern, just as the big hearts within them must have been hard. They marched along in silence, their feet crunching on the fallen glass and stumbling

on the broken stone. They saw what had been done : they knew what they must do.

“Bonne chance !” I would have cried, but somehow I remained dumb. It was all so terrible—so terribly terrible. The thought of the destruction and the murder that had been, and of the deaths and maimings that were yet to be. No taunted bull in any arena could have been goaded to such fighting fury as were these grim-faced men during that march.

Aerschot, as we found, had not only been burnt, it had also been plundered. Pillage and wholesale robbery had taken place. Acts incredibly disgusting had been committed. In most of the sacked houses we entered we found that ornaments had been broken and furniture smashed up. Chairs and couches had been ripped open and slashed with knives. The very wallpaper had been torn down, so that much of it was hanging in long, ragged strips. Every drawer had been burst open and ransacked. Desks had been broken into and everything of value taken away. Pictures had been cut up and destroyed ; art of all kinds had been utterly ruined. The floors were littered with scattered papers and clothes and indescribable filth. And everywhere were bottles—bottles—bottles. The bottles of wine the Germans had not drunk had been smashed and their contents poured away.

“On the front door of one of them, a rather big house of good appearance, belonging to Dr. X——” says M. Orts, “we could still read the

following inscription which had been written in chalk, although it had been partly wiped out:

“ ‘Bitte dieses Haus zu schonen da wirklich friedliche gute Leute.

(Signed) BANNACH, Wachtmeister.’

“ We went inside the house which had been occupied by officers. For that reason one of them seemed to have been willing to preserve it from the general devastation.

“ As we entered, a sickening smell of spilled wine attracted our attention to the hundreds of empty or broken bottles which filled the entrance hall, the stairs, and even the courtyard which opened on to the garden. In the rooms themselves was an indescribable mess. We walked on a bed of torn garments and wool from ripped mattresses. Everywhere furniture had been broken open. In the top rooms, close to the beds, were still more empty bottles.

“ The dining-room also was full of them. Dozens of wine glasses covered the table and the sideboards, around which were lacerated chairs and *canapés*. In the corner, a piano with soiled keyboard . . . seemed to have been knocked in with the blows of heavy boots. Everything went to show that this house had for several nights been the scene of disgusting drunken revelling. In the Place du Marché we found the house of notary L—— in the same state.

“ We are able to state now that the population of the quiet and labour-loving city of Aerschot is absolutely and totally ruined, and this is due to an organised pillaging of every house.





The German chalk writing that saved this house. The women are examining a piece of German shell,



“During these weeks the German soldiers went from one house to another, stealing and pillaging every one they visited. Everywhere that they found objects that did not satisfy their cupidity they destroyed them. The officers kept the better class houses for their own use. All the valuables that the owner had not had time to put in a place of safety—silverware, family heirlooms, minted silver and coins—everything had been stolen. The inhabitants declared that in many cases the Germans set fire to the houses for the sole purpose of covering up the traces of their thefts. Entire loads of wagons have left Aerschot in the direction of Germany.

“As for the initial cause of the sack of Aerschot, the Germans pretended that one of their officers had been killed by a civilian. They pointed out young Tielemans as the guilty person. This statement is contradicted by every one, and it suffices to remember that by the very avowal of the Germans themselves the destruction of Aerschot has been the result of a matured decision.

“In the eyes of the German commander—the massacre of an undetermined number of innocent people; the transportation of many hundreds more; the treatment inflicted on old men, women, and children; the ruin of so many families; the firing and sacking of a town of eight thousand souls—all these in the eyes of the German commander are the retaliation that the act of one single boy tends to justify!”

Before we returned from Aerschot to Antwerp we visited many other parts of the town.

We then came across, for the first time, chalk-written signs made by German spies for the benefit of their soldiers. At first these signs meant nothing to us, but later on, when we read an article by a French officer on the German spy-signs, we remembered what we had seen. On barn doors, and on, for instance, the brick wall of the school near the Place du Marché in Aerschot, the signs were chalked up. They were all of cows in various positions.

But these cows were of great importance. Very crudely drawn as some of them were, suggesting the work of a schoolboy's hand, they yet advised the German troops of the whereabouts of the Belgian soldiers. The cow was drawn so that its innocent horns pointed in the direction of the Belgians. In some cases the horns pointed straight towards where one stood in front.

When the cow was drawn so that it was seen lying down, the meaning was that the Belgians lay under cover somewhere in the direction towards which the animal's horns pointed. A "bucking" cow meant that an aeroplane had passed. This system was not very complicated. But in other parts of Belgium I have come across all manner of mystical signs—numbers and figures and zodiacal-like marks. All these were written in chalk—of which material the Germans made much use in Belgium. All notices on house-doors, etc., were written in chalk. One reason, perhaps,

is that chalk is easily wiped out. Therein it differs from blood—in which the German crimes are written—and which is immovable.

When we got to the railway station we found that it also had been wrecked. The station buildings had been broken into and all the money in them had been stolen. Opposite the station was a café, kept by a man and his wife and two servants. The place was well stocked with food and provisions. There was an abundant supply of wine and other liquors on the premises. And there were enough cigars and cigarettes for a whole army. Yet the Germans had not even looked into it! For some unaccountable reason it had been left absolutely untouched, in spite of the fact that every other house had been sacked.

We went through the ruined streets. The stench of putrefaction was sickening. We were nauseated with smells and sights alike. Just before we crossed the bridge over the Démer, we saw the ruins of a burnt café on the left-hand corner at the Aerschot side of the bridge. The glass sign above remained uninjured. It stood out amongst the blackened ruins, its lettered name a terrible mockery, ironical and derisory. And so we read the name—

“HARMONIE.”

## CHAPTER XIII

### LIERRE

FROM the headquarters of the Croix Rouge, in the Place de Meir, we received orders to go on September 22 to Lierre and then to Heyst op den Berg and Aerschot. We went by way of the villages of Vieux Dieu and Mortsel. This latter one was by this time a mere name. All its houses and towns had been laid low. Only bare entrenched and fortified fields remained where streets of houses had at one time been.

At Lierre there was a great gathering of Belgian troops. The streets were so crowded with soldiers of all regiments that we could hardly move along in the car. Our passage across the square in front of the Town Hall was a crawling stop-every-second affair. In the Town Hall itself—the *Hôtel de Ville*—with its old spire and its iron-figured date, 1369, were the headquarters of the Belgian General Staff.

We stopped at the Red Cross Ambulance dépôt, and delivered our message to the head of the institution, Senator X—— who told us that King Albert was in consultation with his generals in the Town Hall, and that he had early that morning reviewed his troops. He also told us that the King would be leaving the Town Hall

immediately after lunch, and that if we waited we would have an opportunity of seeing him. Of course we made up our minds to wait, so we went into a neighbouring "Cercle Catholique" to have our lunch the meanwhile.

While we were at our meal we were witnesses of the simplicity of King Albert's mode of living during war time. He had lunch in the main room of the Town Hall with his generals. The lunch was cooked in a pastry shop, just opposite, in the square. The lady of the shop and her daughters, all dressed in their best Sunday silk frocks, proudly carried the covered dishes across the square and up the front steps, highly delighted to have the honour of attending to the King's wants.

Here was my childhood's idea of a king's meal come true! You know how hard it is to rid one's mind of the illusory ideas of early youth. Some of these imageries linger on and on in one's brain so that they become the ideas of later days also. And just as one gets so many of one's childish ideas from the picture-books of the nursery so I got my idea of a king's meal from these pages. Always there was an ancient hall: always there were covered dishes, and always there were silk-dressed maids to carry them across an open court. Who ever thinks of a king eating *hors d'œuvres* and soup and special fish? The nursery picture-book influence is strong: a big pie is the only proper dish to set before a king. And here it was. Here were the maids in

silk, and the white covered dishes. I might almost have imagined the king in the gaudy gold-laced garb of an ancient ruler, with knee-breeches and buckled shoes and all that, had he not come down the front steps after lunch and stood for a moment before he entered his car and drove off.

King Albert is a King and a Man. That is the greatest praise one can give him. Tall and broad and straight, he is every inch a soldier, every inch a king. His face is as handsome as the deeds that have made him the hero of the world to-day. In the simple dark uniform he wore he looked the fine brave man he is. An English soldier whom I met in West Flanders some weeks later said of King Albert, "'E's a king, 'e is. 'Andsome as they make 'em."

A Belgian minister, one of the most prominent members of the Cabinet, told me an incident that illustrates a typical phase of King Albert's character.

During one of the earliest sorties from Antwerp there was a complaint amongst some of the Belgian soldiers that the chief officers remained too far in the rear. It was not a loud complaint by any means, for there was not sufficient to justify a big outcry, but it reached the King's ears. He did not speak to the generals about what he heard. He remained quite silent on the matter. But next day he went right up to the trenches and remained under a deadly fire for some hours. The chief officers, of course,



went with the King. And they took the hint. There were no more complaints from the ranks on their account.

The sequel to this action of King Albert's was that his ministers assembled in the King's presence and rebuked him for his foolhardiness, just as a group of serious masters might reprove a schoolboy.

"If it is necessary for my soldiers to be there, it is necessary for me to be there also," said the King.

The ministers pointed out to him the danger.

"Why should my soldiers have to face that danger if I cannot?" asked his Majesty.

The ministers grew serious. A King's duty, they pointed out, is not a soldier's duty. They spoke to him about his duty to the State and so on.

"The King grumbled a little," said the important minister to me. "He did not like us speaking to him, but eventually he very grudgingly agreed to run no unnecessary risks."

But in spite of everything King Albert may have said to his alarmed Cabinet, his Majesty has been in the firing line ever since, running the same risks as his men, facing the same dangers, and having no more special attention than any other commanding general.

Well, then, to return to Lierre. The King came down the steps of the *Hôtel de Ville* and entered his reddish-brown motor-car, and went off in the direction of Emblehem. Two other

cars followed him—a 100 h.p. Opel white-painted car and a brown-coloured 60 h.p. car. But we also followed in our car and were lucky enough to keep in touch with the three others. Near Emblehem our progress was difficult. The roads were crowded with numerous artillery guns and ammunition wagons: cavalry and dog-drawn mitrailleuses. We were on the eve of an important action. We branched off, however, into a side road, where we nearly ran into the white-painted car that had followed King Albert's own automobile.

Here, in this comparatively quiet spot, was a small gathering of high officers, blue-uniformed and gold-braided as to their caps and helmets. And not twenty yards from us, surrounded by his generals, was King Albert, bending over a large map that was spread out on a little folding camp-table. After a few minutes, his Majesty motioned to one of the generals. He exchanged a few words with him, probably over orders to be given, then stepped into his car and proceeded further on, followed by his staff.

"The difference," said Albert, looking towards the disappearing car, "the difference!"

"You mean in the King?" I asked.

"Yes. Only three months ago I saw him walking along the sea-front at Ostend with the two little princes—a quiet-living, peaceful man—like any of his own citizens. Now that fine face of his is transformed altogether. There is a sternness and determination now that never



King Albert watching a cyclist battalion set out. Note the wounded men on the right.



were before. Did you notice how composed and self-reliant he was amongst all those old white-haired generals? Oh, he's a king, he's a king!"

That was always the summing-up. King Albert is a king.

The same change that Albert noticed in the King had, of course, come over the country itself. A month—a day, for that matter—before the war broke out one would have looked on Belgium as one of the most peaceful little countries in the world. Looking at it on the map, one would never have believed Belgian resistance possible. But one cannot judge by maps—else one would think the road to Scotland lay uphill. The Belgian bantam had faced the German eagle, and had dug its little spurs into the larger bird before it retreated with its little body torn by giant talons, but with its fighting spirit strengthened and its sharp claws capable as ever of inflicting wounds. The almost forgotten Latin of my school-days came back to my mind as I remembered the Cæsar I had read in days long past, "*Omnia Gallia divisa est in tres partes. . . . Omnium Gallorum fortissimi sunt Belgae*"—"The bravest of all these," wrote Julius Cæsar, "are the Belgians." The Belgians were the only Gallic nation—the only people in all Gaul, which was divided into three parts—who were able to check the invasions of the Cimbri and the Teutons. History has indeed repeated itself.

We left the main road to Emblehem and pro-

ceeded to Heyst op den Berg with our messages to the Red Cross ambulances. Thence we went on to the *avant-postes*, where we found Belgian soldiers with the sections of quick-firing guns (mitrailleuses) at Hallaer.

From the height of Heyst op den Berg, a large village built on the top of a sand dune, and standing alone in the immense fields of the East *Campine*, the observing parties of mitrailleuses could command a very large area. Hallaer is a suburb of Heyst, and we met the Belgian soldiers on the slope, in a big beet field where the dog-drawn mitrailleuses were all in position in trenches dug out in large half-circles.

We were met by the captains of these companies, who were delighted with the few newspapers of the latest date that we gave to them. I must mention here that all during the war in Belgium nothing pleased the officers and the men more than newspapers—unless it were cigarettes. Newspapers and tobacco were wanted more than anything else. The soldiers cared less for want of sleep, food or clothes, than for cigarettes and news. All the time we were in Belgium we never went near a battlefield without taking French and Flemish newspapers with us to give to the men. My cigarette-case and my pockets were always well filled with cigarettes when we went out—and always empty when we reached home. Messrs. Wills may like to know that their “Gold Flakes” justified their name. A newspaper without a cigarette was good—just as a

cigarette was good without a newspaper—but to give a man both was to satisfy all his immediate wants.

In regard to the mitrailleuse guns, we saw some remarkably smart work done.

Two of the guns just in front of us had recently been firing. For some reason or other, it was necessary to change the barrels of the guns, so the men in charge dismounted all the mechanism of firing, put new barrels on the guns, replaced everything in order, and were ready again to fire their “Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha” bullets in exactly fifty-four seconds! This amazingly clever work was done with the utmost calm—no hurry, but practical, methodical work.

And the dogs—the real dogs of war that one has never read of! What wonderful animals they are! The milk-cart and the little market wagon had given way to deadly mitrailleuse guns, and the dogs bent their strong shoulders forward to their task just the same. There they were now, lying at rest amid the boom of the guns, their big pink tongues hanging through the muzzles round their panting mouths. The friend of man, indeed! I think it was an American author who made one of his North-West characters say, “To hell with horses! Give me a dog. He’s a man’s best pal, anyhow.” Oh, they are wonderful animals are these wonderful dogs of a wonderful people.

We went on our way along the road to Aerschot, but about half-way, at the height of

Beersel, where the Belgian advance guards were, we were stopped by a party of cavalrymen. The Germans were at Schriek on one side of the road and at Houtvenne and Boischot on the other. Less than an hour before, two civilian cyclists had been killed by a party of Germans hidden in the thickets nearby.

When we returned to Antwerp that night we met some friends at dinner who asked us where we had been and if we had seen anything.

"We saw the King," we said—and all other news was insignificant in comparison with that.



## CHAPTER XIV

### THE "CURFEW" IN ANTWERP

WITH the coming of the Zeppelins and the darkening nights, it was ordered in Antwerp that all lights must be out by eight o'clock. Dark blinds and curtains were placed in every window lest a gleam of light from inside might penetrate without. Many of the hotels placed red bulbs along the corridors and staircases of the building where ordinary electric light had been, so that one's journey to one's bedroom was in the semi-darkness of a photographer's developing room. A yellow light in one's bedroom would fetch a gendarme from the street without.

On moonlight nights, the curfew rule was not so bad, but there were other nights of blue-blackness when one could not see a yard in front of one, so that one's progress after eight was groping-wise. Meal hours had to be altered. The seventy dinners had to be put forward to seven o'clock. At five minutes to eight the waiter would produce the bill and an anxious *patron* would worry considerably lest a customer should overstay his welcome by so much as a single minute and place the *café licence* in jeopardy.

Within a minute there was a daily transformation scene. At half a minute before eight, the

cafés and shops were lit as usual : the street standards shone overhead. At eight o'clock and half a minute, the streets and shops were dark. The people who had not already caught the last tramway car walked home like shadows in the streets.

But there were sometimes the moonlit nights I have mentioned. The streets were then as clear as early day. And there were always motor-cars to light the way. Some of these, with enormous head-lights, used to run through the streets at night as though there were no curfew law. But only one head-light was allowed. You could see the glare of light from it come sweeping round the street corners long before the throbbing car itself appeared.

With the coming of the second Zeppelin, folks began to think of packing up. The bombs threw terror into folks' hearts. For the first time the inhabitants of the town had a taste of war. It caused something of a panic. Anxious fathers worried over the safety of their wives and children. Many arranged to go to Holland and England. Some went as far as Ostend only—until the Zeppelin followed them there, when they hastily took ship for England and safety. Cellars were converted into sleeping chambers. Many folk who lived in lonely houses, shut up their homes and came to the hotels where there was company. One felt much safer in a crowd.

Hawkers in the streets sold gaudily coloured souvenirs of the visits of the dreaded airships. These were more terrifying than the bombs them-

selves. I have seen women shudder when they saw the pictured horrors. Yet an innate morbidity made folks buy a copy. I have one now—a ghastly thing in black and red and yellow, the colours of the Belgian flag.

From it one is apt to think that Zeppelins came in the yellow sunshine of midday. The streets were small compared to the huge dragon overhead that spat out flames and sparks and reddish smoke as well as balls of fire that exploded everywhere like multi-coloured asterisks. The streets had holes of great size in them. The houses were on fire and tumbling down. Men and women were rushing about in all directions, arms outstretched and faces terror-stricken, picking their way amongst prostrate fellow-citizens and limbless victims of the bursting bombs.

It was all very terrible, and yet we used to joke about it. The banging of a door—the report of a motor-car's exhaust—the dropping of a tray in a café—and we'd cry "Zeppelins!" On moonlit nights we'd say—"Fine weather for the Zeppelins. We'll have them here to-night." Those of us who slept in rooms above the first story used to say that we were all the nearer if the airship came. And when we left a friend at night with a promise to see him in the morning, we always said—"Provided the Zeppelins don't get me!"

Even the children used to jest about the hated machines. There is a rag-time song—I believe it is "Everybody's doing it"—the tune of which

was known in Antwerp. It goes "Rum—tum—tum—tum—tum-tum-tum-tum"—four slow notes and three quick ones. To this tune I've heard little children singing merrily, "Zep—zep—zep—zep—Zeppelin!" and so on. It was all very light-hearted. But we joked about everything in these days. We laughed at the very idea of Germans ever entering Antwerp. Our wishes were the fathers of our thoughts. We believed we were as safe as if there were no war. Even the death of men we had joked with a day or two before did not affect our optimism.

After eight o'clock I used to sit in the darkened lounge of my hotel. Many soldiers, chiefly officers and volunteers, used to be there also. I knew most of them. We discussed the war, of course. It was the only topic of conversation. Men who had returned from battle told each other of their adventures. To them the whole war was highly exciting. They never spoke of danger. I do not think they even thought of it. Many of these friends of mine have since been killed. The circle that used to meet grew gradually less.

I met one man of whom I heard a good story. Before he had volunteered for active service he had lived near Brussels in a charming château of his own. The Germans had pillaged this château and then wrecked the whole place. The news of this came to its owner, whose rage was intense. He was a member of a cyclist corps, so one night, without saying a word of his intentions to anyone, he set off alone, with vengeance in his heart.

It must have been a perilous ride, because he had to go through the German lines. Eventually, however, he reached a wood near his château and also near which the Germans were. He dismounted, hid his bicycle amongst the bushes, then awaited an opportunity to revenge the destruction of his property. In the early hours of the morning a party of Germans passed along the road by the side of the wood in which he lay. He waited until they were abreast of him, then with his rifle, and afterwards with one of the two revolvers he had with him, he opened fire and killed seven men. The others fled at once, so the cyclist mounted his machine and set off contentedly in the opposite direction and reached Antwerp later in the day.

"Je me suis vengé," he said on meeting one of his friends, from whom it was that I heard the story.

One night we discussed not the war but the peace terms. Of the ultimate result of the campaign no one seemed to have the very slightest doubt. On many of these nights when we sat together after eight we altered the map of Europe to our mutual satisfaction. One Belgian declared that he would be satisfied if the new Belgium included the valley of the Rhine. Some of the men wanted even more territory than that. Others wanted money as well as land. We agreed that Belgium should have both. For great Britain I claimed nothing more than glory and national satisfaction. There was a Brussels doctor who was

serving with the Red Cross. His wants were not so great.

“Give me Munich and Colmar,” said he. “Munich for beer—and Colmar for *pâté de foie gras* !”

Here is one of the little significant incidents of the war. One morning I woke up and found that my hands and arms and neck had been badly bitten by mosquitoes. Each bite had resulted in a little red lump, and all these were exceedingly irritating. I tried not to think of them, but next morning I found that my stock of bites had been doubled, so I went downstairs and after breakfast spoke to the manager about it. I explained that the mosquitoes were so numerous that I would have to have a mosquito net placed round my bed.

The manager expressed his sorrow and went so far as to apologise for the insects' behaviour. He told me that he could not understand why there was such a plague. As a rule, he said, there was always a number of mosquitoes in Antwerp during the summer, but not so many as we had then.

I found out the explanation of this later in the day. It appears that the firing of the big guns at Fort Waelhem had frightened all the swallows away, so the mosquitoes had no birds to catch them and were thriving without opposition !

This reminds me of the punishment a Great Eastern Steamship captain had in mind for the Kaiser and his heir. Just as folks discussed the possible peace terms, so people argued as to the

fate of the German Emperor and the Crown Prince. Some terrible punishments were discussed, including torture and dismemberment, and even burning at the stake. Sudden death, it was generally agreed, was not enough. The captain was in a little café near the docks when I met him. His contempt for the "Keeser," as he called him, was very great. And this is what he hoped would happen when the war was over.

"I'd 'ave 'im an' 'is son sent to Devil's Island," he said, "after everybody else 'ad been removed, an' I'd 'ave all the skeeters in Antwerp sent to keep 'em company." He puffed thoughtfully at his pipe for a few minutes, then laid a hand on my knee and added impressively, as if to make sure of the punishment being as perfect as possible, "Mind ye—*no women!*"

In Antwerp, you had only to be English to be wonderful. "Anglais?" a shopkeeper would say, and on you nodding an affirmative, she would say, "Vive l'Angleterre!" "Anglais?" a working man would ask unnecessarily after you had inquired of him the whereabouts of a certain street. And he would say without waiting for a reply, "Vive l'Angleterre!" Out on the battle-line a soldier would say "Anglais" as I passed, and his companions would join him in exclaiming "Vive l'Angleterre!"

"Vive les Belges!" I would cry back in reply.

"Monsieur," a soldier would say to me, "when are the English coming?"

I was asked that question many times a day.

The soldiers' faith in the English was marvellous. The officers even would ask the same question.

"Soon," I used to say as if I possessed a certain mysterious wisdom. "They're coming soon." But I knew nothing of that. It was good, however, to see how my answer cheered the men. I firmly believe that if a good military band had marched through the streets of Antwerp with a thousand British soldiers behind it, the effect on the population and on the soldiers would have been wonderful. The music would have done as much good as an additional four thousand men.

I said as much to Albert.

"You're right," he said. "It's music we need. Strong, stirring music."

For all the time I was in Belgium I never heard a note. What military bands I saw were silent. Sometimes a few buglers would toot a few bars, but that was all. There was not an orchestra in Antwerp. I never even heard the tinkle of a piano. No one seemed to sing a single note. As a matter of fact, I heard singing on one occasion. It was on the Saturday night before Antwerp fell. Hundreds of soldiers marched down the Place de Meir on their way towards the inner forts of the town. They were singing some native marching song—not loudly as the British soldiers do, but quietly and in a subdued voice. They were marching down the centre of the broad street. From the pavement it was difficult to hear them. One had to join the crowd who lined up along the



middle of the road to see them pass before one could hear them properly.

The belief in the English and the affection of the Belgians for England were, as I have said, wonderful. A charming incident occurred one afternoon shortly before Antwerp was evacuated. I was in the "Five o'clock Tea-shop" in the Marché aux Souliers, near the Place Verte, having tea and cakes with some English correspondents. As we were sitting there a middle-aged lady passed us on her way out of the shop.

"Excuse me, messieurs," she said, "but you are English, n'est-ce pas?"

We told her we were.

"Look," she said, "I read your English journals"—and she showed us a copy of the *Daily Telegraph* which she had in her hand. "You will forgive me, messieurs," she continued, "but you are Englishmen and I feel that I cannot pass you without saying 'Thank you very much for all you have done for our poor people.' Good-day, messieurs."

And she had gone, before we, who were somewhat embarrassed, could do more than murmur a confused chorus of unintelligible phrases. Her speaking to us was only one of the many charming actions of a charming people.

## CHAPTER XV

### TERMONDE

THE road to Termonde lay across the Scheldt, by way of St. Nicholas, Waesmunster, Hoeijat, Zogge, Boschstraat and Grembergen. We crossed the river in Antwerp on the narrow, rattling pontoon bridge that has been constructed for the passage of troops, then on past wayside inns and cottages, past the Fort of Zwyndrecht, to St. Nicholas. Much of the country had been cleared for gun-fire. Whole rows of tall trees had been felled. One of a number of small villages was being burnt down. Hundreds of men were digging trenches and constructing shrapnel-proof shelters, and fixing all manner of barricades. Every now and again we had to slow down when passing a stretch of road that had been mined. We showed our papers many times.

When we reached the top of the winding road that leads to Waesmunster, a somewhat important village, where were gathered several different corps of artillery and foot soldiers, we found that the whole surrounding country, as far as one could see, was under water. The Belgian military engineers had cut the dykes of the canalised river Durme in several places, so that even at low-water tide the fields for miles round were covered with

water to the depth of several feet. Passing out of Waesmunster, we had to cross a bridge over the Durme. The water had risen so high on account of the autumn equinoctial tides that we were afraid it would carry the bridge away.

Our ride across the road—the only available one—was unique. Below us on either side was a sea of water. Here and there were the thatched roofs of submerged farms that stood out of the water like tiny islands. Little ships of hay and straw sailed away before the breeze to unknown ports. Flat-bottomed boats were tied to the trees at the side of the road. One could have floated over roofs and housetops in them. Through this huge expanse of water, our highway, edged with poplar trees, wound like a narrow ribbon. I do not know what would have happened had we met another car.

In Hoeijat and Zogge, two small villages below Waesmunster, we found that the few peasants who were left were in hiding, afraid of everybody and everything. We spoke to one or two of these poor people, but they were so terror-stricken that we could get no information whatever from them. At Grembergen, which is really a suburb of Termonde, its station being on the very northern limit of the old disused forts of the town, we found many Belgian troops waiting on the north side of the Scheldt, which flows round part of Termonde, for the order to advance to meet the Germans who were to the south of the town. We motored past them and came over the bridge that had just been

constructed by the Belgian engineers to take the place of the iron railway bridge that they had previously blown up.

Of all the towns in Belgium that have been wrecked, Termonde, perhaps, has suffered most. Several times it was bombarded, and finally when the Germans entered the battered town they set fire to the whole place. I only saw two houses undamaged. A German officer had written in chalk on the doors instructions to the effect that these houses were to be spared. Empty petroleum tins that lay about the pavements of the ruined town showed quite clearly that the holocaust had been deliberate and that the flames had been fed with paraffin and other oils.

On the day the Germans were driven out of Termonde, when they were leaving at one end, Albert and I were backing our car into the town at the other. We went through the ruined streets. The houses were mere shells. Outer walls only remained standing. The woodwork everywhere was simply blackened charcoal. Some of the heaps of burnt stone and wood still smouldered. The scene was terrible.

There were some curious freaks of the fire. For instance, near the square in which is the statue of Juste Lipsius, the National Bank had only its bare walls left. All round it the fire had raged and eaten up all except the stones themselves. Yet when we clambered over the pile of smouldering ruins to the back, we came to a little green garden in which a number of fowls were running



Termonde is totally wrecked. This scene is typical of the whole town.



about amongst the flower-beds. Roses were on the walls, and geraniums and other flowers still bloomed brightly in the various plots. The fire had devastated all the surrounding buildings, but by some queer force of the wind the flames had passed the garden by. The roses were growing not a foot from where the fire had been. Around the railings of the statue, by the way, were heaps of empty bottles. The streets themselves were littered with the broken glass of wine bottles. Great quantities of empty wine, liquor and beer bottles lay all over the town.

One large shop I passed in one of the narrower streets had a long glass sign running the whole length of the establishment above the ground-floor windows. The upper stories of the building had fallen down. Only the ground-floor wall remained with the glass sign at the top. This sign was not even scratched. It stood there bright and new-looking amongst the shattered buildings. Some of the houses opposite had flower-pots still standing on the blackened window-sills. The plants, of course, had perished in the flames.

Below the wrecked Town Hall the famous bells lay on the ground. Some of them were smashed into bits, others were only cracked, but on that account of no further use. The commandant of the police gave Albert a piece of the broken main bell, bearing the date 1547. Facing the Town Hall, we had on our left the ruins of houses and a café. In front of this café were some palms in tubs. They were uninjured. In the centre of the

square was a bandstand. It was full of empty bottles.

In the main street of Termonde, on the left-hand side near the big archway, we came to the temporary hospital of the Sœurs Pauvres Claires. Here we found seven Sisters and an old Belgian doctor, M. Van den Wilden (or Van Wilden), who had remained in the town in spite of the bombardment and the fire, in order to attend to the wounded. In this hospital they had a German under-officer who had been badly wounded in the right knee-cap. The Germans had retreated below Termonde and were encamped in Saint Gilles, but in spite of this a German Red Cross doctor had come into Termonde to examine the man.

Around every wounded German soldier's neck is hung a card which states not only the nature of the wound but also the place where it was received, as well as other particulars. This German doctor mentioned on the injured man's sick-ticket that the wound had been caused by a dum-dum bullet which, he declared, had struck the man. Against this statement Dr. Van den Wilden protested very strongly.

We had lunch in the big square, next the bandstand. We had brought food with us—sandwiches and a cold chicken and a bottle of red wine. Through the town scores of refugees were hurrying from Audeghem and other villages to the south. They came with practically nothing. Some had little bundles tied up in tablecloths and coloured shawls. Most of them simply came as they were.





Termonde. The famous bells of the Hôtel de Ville.



They hurried past the square where we were—a long tired line of them, and then we were alone for some time. A wounded soldier, his arm roughly bandaged, came past us. He had walked in from the battlefield. Then one of the most pathetic incidents of the war occurred. An old man, dressed in a Sunday suit of black, with an old-fashioned black felt hat on his head, and wearing big iron-rimmed spectacles, came slowly by. In one hand he carried a big red handkerchief in which were two cheap ornaments and an alarm clock. In the other hand he had two small brass candlesticks.

We asked him to join us at lunch, so he sat in the car and had some bread and chicken and a glass of wine. He was tired and dusty. He had walked since the early hours of the morning, his progress slow because he was old and alone. All the time he was with us he kept his red handkerchief bundle and the two candlesticks on his knee. They were all he had saved. They were not worth a couple of francs—yet who knows what sentiment raised their value in the old man's eyes.

I cannot explain it, but the sight of the two brass candlesticks upset me almost as much as any of the horrors I saw throughout the war in Belgium.

In Termonde, just at the outskirts of the town, where the soldiers had entrenched themselves on the banks of the old, disused moats, we met young Corporal Van Menten, a nineteen-year-old soldier from Brussels, who was an exceptionally interesting character.

When the Germans entered Termonde for the first time, Van Menten was the last one of the Belgian retreating forces to cross the bridge to the north of the Scheldt, and he it was who, in sight of the swiftly oncoming enemy, blew up the bridge and stopped their progress. Van Menten, I think, had a charmed life. Quick, plucky and enterprising, he had absolutely no thought of danger and risked his life a dozen times a day. On one occasion he crawled right into the German lines and picked out a fine horse, on which he escaped. A less important trophy than a good mount would have taken him back into the enemy's camp.

Young Van Menten had the knack of "finding" things apparently in the easiest way—and always at the moment one wanted them. A chicken for one's dinner, a pair of boots, field-glasses (the late property of a German officer!)—it did not seem to matter what one required, Van Menten produced it in much the same way as a conjuror would bring forth a guinea-pig from the coiffure of an astonished lady member of his audience. And Van Menten shared his "finds" with everybody.

Another charming young man we met was Sub-Lieutenant Baudour. It was at Gand's Gate that we spoke to him. He gave us a letter asking that one of his trophies, the grey cloak of a German general, be given to us so that we could arrange for it to be exhibited in Antwerp amongst other war souvenirs for the benefit of the Croix Rouge. That letter, hastily scribbled in pencil on the back

of an envelope, we still have. The lieutenant himself is now dead. He was wounded on the Yser by shrapnel in the beginning of November and died from his injuries. I do not know the fate of Van Menten.

And there is yet another soldier whom I must mention. Corporal Godfroid Tuytshaevers, a rosy-cheeked, bright-faced boy of sixteen and a half. He was standing up in one of the trenches at the south side of Termonde, a lump of meat in one hand and a can of soup in the other. It was the meal hour, and the tired and hungry men were glad of it. Godfroid Tuytshaevers had as merry and happy a face as I have ever seen. Compared with the men in the trenches he was a mere school-boy. Yet he was a full-blown corporal, if you please !

Now at Grembergen I had seen a captured German officer—a hard-faced, cruel-looking man with an ugly duel scar on his left cheek. And I had said to myself: “That man is typical of Germany. That is the face of the vandal—the face of the hooligan of Kultur.” So now I looked at Corporal Tuytshaevers and said: “And here is Belgium—little Belgium”—for one comes to think of the country as young and bright and inestimably brave. The two faces were perfect symbols of their nations. I cannot think of the German army nowadays without seeing the Grembergen prisoner’s face, and I cannot think of Belgium without recalling the rosy-cheeked boy corporal to my mind’s eye.

On September 26, we went to Termonde again. This time we went by way of Hamme. The railway lines had been filled in with earth and ashes so that we were able to motor across them. The same sensation of travelling across a sea of water came to us. From Termonde we set off on the way to Audeghem, which lies about three miles to the south-west, and which at that time was still in the possession of the Germans.

Once outside Termonde we came early in the morning to within sight of the Audeghem railway gate, just in front of the village. The whole morning we had heard from afar the booming of the guns, and as we neared the village we found that the shells were bursting all around. We went behind the railway signal-box and took shelter there for a while.

Some of the Belgian troops were retreating from Audeghem, where they had been in some hard fighting, and fresh troops of the Eighth Brigade were replacing the tired men. Soon we had enough work to do. Many wounded Belgians came limping along through the only street of the village, and we were kept busy for some time helping to dress their wounds in the precarious shelter of the signal-box.

All manner of wounded men came along. Those whose wounds were slight helped their badly-hurt comrades on. All the soldiers were dust-covered, sweating, and mostly bareheaded. But they were all full of spirit. They looked repeatedly back towards where they had come from, as if reluctant

to leave the scene of action. They allowed us to handle their broken limbs and bleeding, gaping wounds without murmuring. They seemed indifferent to pain. Their eyes still shone bright with the excitement of battle. Their besmeared faces were full of eager interest.

Many were of high-class families, some were humble peasants, but all were so keen on the struggle that, wounded seriously as many of them were, they could not resist shouting out to their retreating comrades to ask how things were going at the other end of the village.

Sometimes one of the retreating men would recognise a friend amongst the injured. Then he would call out asking him if he were badly wounded or not. The answer cried back to him as a rule was, "I don't know. But it hurts terribly"—and this with a little forced laugh as though the suffering man was really joking about it all. "Bonne chance!" the other man would shout back, and continue on his way.

We got nine men in the car—it had the most elastic accommodation of any car I've ever seen!—and went back to the ambulance of Grembergen, where we unloaded the wounded and washed the floor of the car with several buckets of water. . . . We had had two men with severed arteries with us. We had managed to lessen the flow of blood by means of a bayonet used as a tourniquet, but we were unable to stop the bleeding altogether.

Back again to Audeghem, through Termonde, where, on the north side of the bridge, we met

General Michel, of Namur, and General Schriek, to whom we reported. Perhaps we ought not to pride ourselves on what we had done, but I must mention that General Michel congratulated us both for the way we were willingly exposing ourselves to danger in order to help the wounded. The few kind words General Michel spoke to us and the cordial hand-shake he gave us were at that time particularly pleasing to us both. Even now the memory is a source of satisfaction.

By the time we had arrived at a point only half a mile distant from the railway crossing of Audeghem, the last retreating Belgians were behind us, and we could see the road to Audeghem and the village itself swept by German shrapnel. The little white puffs of smoke were very close to each other and were bursting in such rapid succession as to leave a constant flock of fleecy clouds in the clear sky.

We turned the car round and waited behind the bend of the road. An armoured mitrailleuse motor-car came along from Termonde and stopped for a time with us. It turned round and then advanced stern first. We agreed that we would follow it, backing our car behind it at a distance of about a quarter of a mile. The road was so narrow that this precaution was necessary, because, had the Germans appeared, we could not hastily have turned the car.

Many of the Belgians were reported to be lying wounded in the fields below Audeghem where the battle had raged in the morning, and there were





German Red Cross men and wounded Germans coming in from the battle of Audéghem.



still some men in the village itself. We went as far as the gate of the railway crossing, near the deserted village. The road here was much broader, so the driver of the armoured car turned it round so that it proceeded head foremost. We did the same, then we both advanced slowly.

The Germans were shelling the district intermittently. We came as far as the little open space in front of the church, which had been badly hit on the southerly side of the spire and on its roof. While we stopped to try and find out the whereabouts of the Germans, two men came from a house near which was a signpost, and told us that several men lay dead in a garden near by.

Evidence of the fierce struggle which had taken place was to be found in every direction. In the porch of a small beer-house, left of the church, were the bodies of two soldiers lying amongst a mass of broken rifles, knapsacks, water-bottles, etc. Much equipment had been discarded by the retreating men. The street was littered with it. The houses were spattered with rifle and shrapnel bullets.

A Belgian staff officer and some cavalymen rode up to where we were. The captain in charge of the horsemen gave orders to the crew of the armoured car to go and reconnoitre on the road to Gyseghem. We were allowed the privilege of following. Two cavalymen went ahead to scout, then followed the huge grey armoured car, and we again came behind it.

On the left, at a sharp bend of the road, we came

suddenly upon the four dead horses of a light battery. They had apparently all been killed by the same shell. All four lay in position, with harness on and traces cut.

Turning again sharply to the right, we came in full view of the battlefield of the morning. The road runs in a straight line bordered by tall trees. On our right-hand side, close to the road, was a fine white-painted windmill. On both sides cabbage and beet fields extended far away. The country was flat, like most of the north of Belgium.

The armoured car in front of us stopped. We came up to it. The road again became very narrow, so both cars turned round again. We advanced cautiously stern first. Suddenly, at the back of the windmill, we saw a grey-coated line of Germans retreating in a southerly direction. At once the mitrailleuse opened fire and we heard the "ha-ha-ha-ha" of the quick-firing gun—the "kettledrum" of which I have written. The retreating figures bobbed in and out, seeking what shelter they could in the ditches and narrow side roads. Then they disappeared altogether. The gun stopped firing. We had watched this incident much as we might walk alongside another and watch him shoot at rabbits. Again there was the peculiar lack of any sense of danger.

Dead men and horses lay in the fields. Close to the mill were the bodies of two Belgians. They had been hit in the chest. Their faces were blue: bloody froth was at their mouths. On the opposite side of the road were two others. One had his

head half blown away ; the other was fearfully wounded in the left breast. A little farther along the road, past the windmill, five dead Germans lay behind the road hedge of a wayside farm. They lay in all directions, terribly shattered.

The little farm had served as a fort for the Germans. The walls had been pierced at regular spaces with holes to be used as loopholes for rifles. On the right we saw a good distance away the flutter of a whitish rag. We went across and found there, lying against a heap of beet, a Belgian soldier wounded in the breast and very weak. Further along the main road we met a hatless Belgian soldier, crawling along on all fours in the ditch. He grinned at us as we approached, and laughed wildly and loudly. He had been shot in the instep, and he was crawling along dragging his bleeding foot behind him. He had lost much blood. Now he was raving.

More wounded men came limping along. We loaded our car and Albert took as many as he could to Grembergen. I remained behind at the mill. Belgian artillery nearby were pouring shells into the retreating Germans.

Albert came back after a time, and we proceeded to Gyseghem. In the convent there were many wounded Belgians and Germans. We took the Belgians away with us to Grembergen. Then we returned to Antwerp where we arrived about nine o'clock, and reported to the Red Cross. The city was in darkness and apparently asleep.

About twelve o'clock midnight we set off again,

and arrived at Grembergen at two in the morning. On the Antwerp side of the bridge, in one of the big sheds of a factory, we found a number of horses stabled. We went into the shed, lay down in a corner and fell asleep.

## CHAPTER XVI

### GYSEGHEM AND SAINT GILLES

WITH the coming of daylight about four o'clock in the morning, the Belgian batteries on the south of Termonde commenced firing. And at the first thunderclap of the guns we woke up, tired and hot-eyed and very stiff-limbed. Washing was a matter of secondary importance. On the battle line one does not worry much about one's looks. A week at the front alters a man's appearance considerably. It is often difficult to recognise in the person of an unwashed, unshaven, unkempt soldier in the trenches, the spick and span volunteer one dined with in Antwerp ten days before.

One of the dirtiest and grimmest soldiers I have ever seen, his face coated with a paste of sweat and dust, his uniform grey-white with mud, his hands engrained with the accumulated dirt of many days, asked me in perfect English if I had any news from France. I told him the "situation-remains-unchanged" report of the British press bureau and discussed the general position with him. His English was the English of the university and Mayfair.

I told Albert this later and foolishly expressed

my surprise at a private soldier speaking with such a cultured accent.

"That was the Baron X——," was the answer. "His family is one of the highest in Belgium."

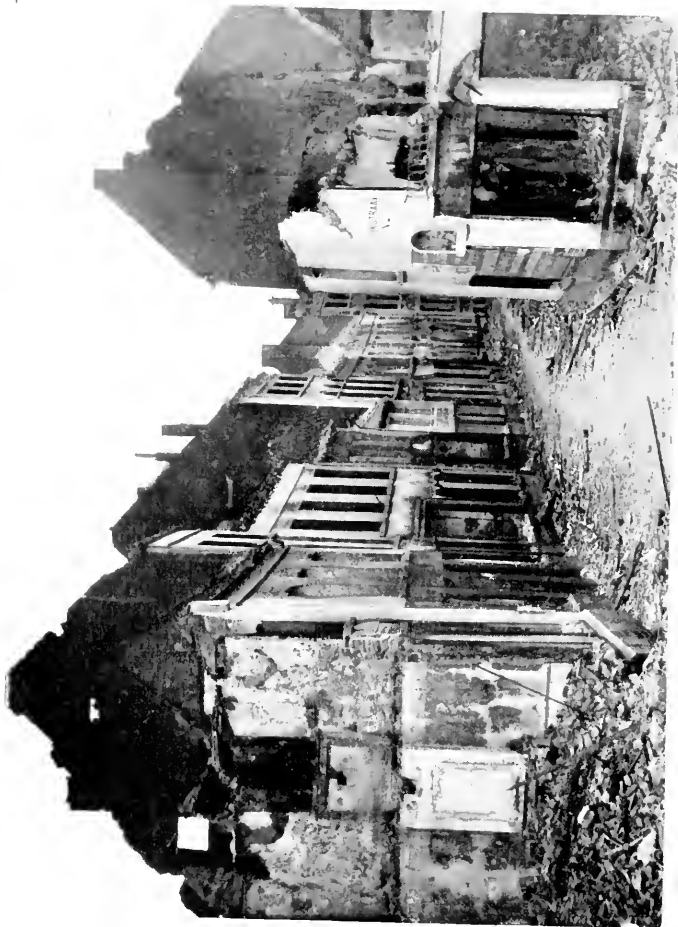
You see, dress and appearance are of no moment in the battle-line. Just as no one troubled much about his dress in Antwerp itself. I think I have dined in every first-class hotel and restaurant in that city. Folks dined in uniform or tweeds. The only man I saw who dressed for dinner was an American on his first night in the town—and folks mistook him for a waiter.

But food is very important. Nothing is so fatiguing as hunger. And at four o'clock in the morning we would have given anything for a cup of coffee and a roll. Van Menten procured the bread and went to find the coffee. He soon returned to say he had found a place where he thought we could get some.

At the back of the road there was a little house, of which all except the front part had been blown away by a shell. The kitchen had been neatly cut in half, and there it was when we reached it, exposed to the full light of the day. From the garden at the back we could see the little painted wooden mantelpiece with its saints at either end under glass covers. A pair of blue vases stood there also, and in the centre was an elaborate clock. On both sides of the fireplace were pots and pans and jars and all manner of mysterious cooking instruments.

Sweeping the floor and dusting the chairs and





Termonde. "The houses were mere shells."



tidying up generally was a little old cleanly-dressed old-fashioned woman, who was doing her house-work at that time in the morning without worrying about the wrecked state of her house. Van Menten had not spoken to the little old woman. He had seen her working away and had come at once for us.

The moment she saw us she invited us in. No doors to open here! Simply a climb over a heap of fallen stones and we were "inside." She lit her fire and while it was commencing to burn, got down one of the mysterious utensils and ground some coffee. Then after a few minutes more, the kettle boiled and the water was poured into the jug, and we had the finest beverage in the world! That cup of coffee on that chilly September morning is one of my dearest memories of the war.

After our breakfast we went off again to Gyseghem to commence the transportation of the German wounded. And here once more we saw the terrible side of war. Death is not so horrible to see as mutilation and suffering.

The Convent at Gyseghem is a rather big square-shaped building. It has two wings which extend far behind the front building. In the middle of the open court, formed by the walls of the Convent and the two wings, stood a shrine of Our Lady. This had been decorated with great bunches and garlands of flowers of all colours and varieties. We entered the big room on the left which had previously been used as a refectory for the nuns.

Now it contained many rows of white-lined beds, in each of which was a wounded German soldier.

In the inner court, against the walls and under the glass *marquise* were heaps of weapons, hats and helmets, military garments, buckles and belts, cartridges and bayonets. We entered the ward itself and were struck with the peculiar quietness of the place. The atmosphere of peace was almost uncanny. The silent Sisters were going from bed to bed, administering patiently and carefully to the injured men.

After we had taken the wounded Belgians to Grembergen the previous day, we had been asked, in view of the military order of transport, to find out the exact state of the wounded and to ascertain how many of them could be brought away with safety to themselves. The Sisters, however, were reluctant to allow their wounded to be removed. They pleaded with us to leave the men where they were, as they thought that the presence of the injured Germans would be a guarantee to them against outrage.

However, the Belgian Military Authority was not to be discussed, and an imperative order from the General Doctor was given to the Red Cross column of ambulances to proceed to the removal of the wounded men to the station at Grembergen.

We went from one bedstead to another seeing which men could be taken away. Some of the German soldiers had been very badly hurt. One man—a powerful fellow—had a bullet wound near

his ear. He was constantly raving and struggling. The nuns had great difficulty in attending to him. Another had been shot through the left breast. Each time he inhaled he suffered greatly. When he exhaled a froth of blood blew from his wound. Another man had the fleshy part and muscle of his left arm shot off. Several inches of bare bone were visible.

And amongst these horrors, the good Sisters were working diligently to relieve the suffering of the enemy's men. They were only helped by the civilian doctor of Gyseghem. To this man is due a high tribute of respect. When everybody else had fled, he remained behind with the few Sisters of the Convent to tend the large numbers of wounded men of both armies.

There were about sixty wounded Germans in the big refectory, and more in other rooms of the Convent. The slightly injured men had their wounds tended and were then made to dress. The order was very strict. In fact, when with Van Menten we were still busy examining the severity of the wounds, the *Médecin Divisionnaire*, who, by the way, has the rank of General, appeared himself in the main room, and soon had every man up who was able to stand the transport by motor-car.

When Albert was helping a big, rather refined-looking German to get his overcoat on over an injured arm, the man—a “Wachtmeister”—turned round to him, gave him a look that begged for secrecy, and then pulled open the drawer of his

night-table and presented him with his revolver—by the butt end!—and also gave him a fine chiselled dagger which he wore in a pocket of his coat. Another sergeant before falling in in front of his bedstead, also gave Albert his revolver.

The men were all very much depressed. While we were stowing as many as we could into the car, the tall "Wachtmeister" asked in very slow German if his friend, the sergeant, could go with him. He said that they had been chums from the beginning of the war: they had got wounded at the same time, and now they would so very much like to keep together. These were the two men, of course, who had had the revolvers.

Albert said it didn't matter to him whether they were together or not—but I knew the dear man's heart was full of understanding for the two men, and I also noticed that he arranged for them to keep together, although he pretended that this was quite an accident. I rode on the step as far as Termonde, where I got off after arranging to meet Albert later on in the day.

On the way to Grembergen, Albert, who had the "Wachtmeister" next to him, tried to find out all about the man and his views on the war. In what he called his "outrageous bad German," he asked the man what he was before the war. The German said that he was a colonial merchant in Hamburg, and also that he was married and had five children.

Albert then asked him his opinion on the war. The man, who was very low-spirited, answered,



One of the wounded Germans taken from Gyseghem to Grembergen. A comrade is assisting him.





“Schrichlich ! Schrichlich !” which means,  
“Fearful ! Awful !”

All the Germans were very depressed. Their great anxiety was to know where we were going to. This they asked us more than once in a somewhat timid way, but, of course, we made no reply.

We entered Termonde, where I got off, then Albert went on to Grembergen, where the Red Cross trains were waiting, discharged his load and went back for more. The worst cases were left at the Convent. After he had gone, I stood alone in the deserted streets.

Termonde, on September 27, was as noiseless as a churchyard. The town was dead. The tranquil canal lay rippleless across the town, its deserted surface dulled with a filmy stagnation. The weather was glorious : a yellow sun, a windless, cloudless sky. Some one had commented to me on the peace of the Sabbath. I had lost count of all days and dates.

There was no sound : eyes shut, one thought of home. For a minute I stood among the fallen stones. And then, as I walked off, my footsteps strangely loud, there came a distant hum that grew and grew until a string of motors rattled over the canal bridge. I watched them pass. Each one was laden with wounded men. White-faced, close-cropped Germans lay back with shut eyes. Belgians, much bandaged, came in other cars. Clumsy horse wagons brought in heavy loads. They rattled past and I walked through the town towards Saint Gilles.

In the fields near the railway station, I saw the graves of two German officers. Rough little white crosses marked the place where the men were buried. I read the two names on the crosses—"Lieutenant Rôteband" and "Lieutenant Khaim."

Early that morning the Germans had been driven out of the village of Saint Gilles. The Belgians had occupied it and now, when I reached the long, narrow street, the soldiers had advanced towards Alost. The street was splashed with blood. Dead horses, terribly gashed by burst shells, lay across the road. Soldiers' caps and torn coats and discarded knapsacks littered the pavements. Here and there lay dead men. On one side the houses were wrecked. The windows were glassless, the woodwork splintered, the walls were bruised and rent. On the other side were deserted cottages whose stone-floored kitchens in front had been transformed into resting-places for the wounded. Mattresses from the beds of the back rooms had been thrown on the floor. Some of the wounded lay there waiting for an ambulance to come. Some of the men no longer needed help. Most of the floors were sticky with blood: the dark-stained patches were not yet dry.

At the end of the street was a little inn. Behind it a cobbled stable-yard, and behind that again a tiny beer garden. The little yard was a shambles. Blood-drenched straw lay at its four sides: Blood-drenched bandages were scattered about: there was a sickening smell of chemicals. Red Cross men, coatless and bare-armed, were attending to the

wounded. The air reeked with the smell of unwashed bodies and of blood.

I walked into the beer garden—a green-grassed place where happy folks had sat on summer nights. There was an ornamental pond in the centre. The banks sloped down towards its surface, forming a huge basin. Around the pond, on pedestals, were painted statuettes of dancing figures in green and blue and yellow and startling red. On one side of the pond was a weeping willow tree. In the shelter of it a Belgian soldier lay—dead. Another Belgian sat in a deck chair at the other side of the water. He lay back in his seat, legs outstretched and eyes fixed on the little sculptured dancers. I went around to him, my hand already searching for my cigarette case so that I might offer him a smoke. But he saw nothing. Death had already glazed his eyes: his face was waxen, his lower jaw relaxed.

At the other end of the town were trenches and rough barricades. Only a few dead and wounded lay in them. To the left the guns had been brought up and the artillerymen were sending shell after shell into the German ranks to the south. The men worked almost mechanically. There was something uncanny about their attack on their unseen foe. The dropping of an officer's raised arm, a cloud of white smoke, a barking report, the sliding back of the barrel in its recoil like a huge piston, the jingle of harness as the waiting horses in the rear started at the discharge, the gruff, quietening shouts of the drivers—then the

re-loading of the gun and the despatch of another shell. Here was Death, dealing out its cards to Death. And away to the south, miles across that broad gulf of trampled fields, was another such scene. For there came a sudden shriek, a sharp explosion and a lightning gleam, and a rain of shrapnel fell all round. Again there came the whinny of the horses: one could see their eyes dilate, their soft nostrils quiver. The gunners kept on firing. . . .

I went back through the blood-stained street, met Albert, and then went with him towards Audeghem and Gyseghem by motor-car. Refugees of all ages hurried past along by the edge of the road. Beside a little mill some Red Cross wagons stood. It was unsafe to proceed further. A grey mitrailleuse car throbbed slowly past. We followed in its wake, backing our car so that on sighting the enemy we could rush off to safety. On either side were beetroot fields. The swollen bodies of dead horses lay to left and right, their stiffened legs sticking grotesquely in the air. Dark groups of what had once been men lay huddled in clumsy heaps.

A hundred yards across the field four men sat. The officer of the armoured car told me they were Belgians, so I went across to them on foot. They sat in a square. I thought they were playing cards. But that was just how death had come on them. One man leant on a heap of beet; another had fallen back in such a way that his knapsack supported him; a third had died as he

sat against a box of tinned meat; the fourth was reclining on one elbow. Wounded, they had crawled together and in that position died grotesquely. Behind them was another man. He was alive but unconscious. He was terribly wounded. There was a rattling in his throat. We took him to the nearest cottage where he died almost immediately.

## CHAPTER XVII

### ALOST

AT about one o'clock that same day the Belgians were repulsing the Germans to the south. The Belgian artillery set off for Alost, and we followed it and arrived in the town in the midst of a battle. Alost was being bombarded by both sides. The Germans were shelling the town, especially the railway station, and the Belgian gunners were answering from several points.

We entered the town alone by way of the tunnel under the railway bridge. The battery of artillery that we were following had branched off across the ploughed fields outside Alost. We were unable to follow them there lest our car should get stuck. When we entered the town we found a party of Belgian guides stationed under the railway bridge to meet any advance of the Germans. We got out of the car and climbed with the officer in charge up to the high embankment of the railway lines, which was near the station. Here we were able to observe the effect of the artillery duel.

The German shells had broken all the points of the railway lines near the station. The lines had been rendered quite useless as no engine or

wagon could possibly get past the broken points without being derailed.

From where we stood we could actually see the shells passing over us on their way to the big glass hall of the station, which was soon in ruins. Shrapnel shells were bursting in the triangular place in front of the station. An important restaurant nearby had already been wrecked by the flying bullets. The few inhabitants of the town who had not yet fled were hurrying to the comparative safety of their cellars.

For a time we stood on the embankment chatting with the Belgian officer. We discussed the moves of the retreating Germans, then we went down to the road again, got into the motor-car and went towards where the Belgians were advancing to see whether we could render any assistance to wounded men. By this time the bombardment had ceased. A few shells fell at intervals, then the firing stopped altogether. The Germans had retreated. We went round to the Station Place to see the effects of the bombardment. Then we turned to our right, passed under the nearest railway bridge and entered Canal Street. I think that was the name. This street, in any case, led from the nearby station to the canalised river Dendre, which was a few hundred yards distant. On our way we were met by fleeing men and women, running wildly towards us.

We reached the river, which runs at right angles to the street. The bridge had been swung round

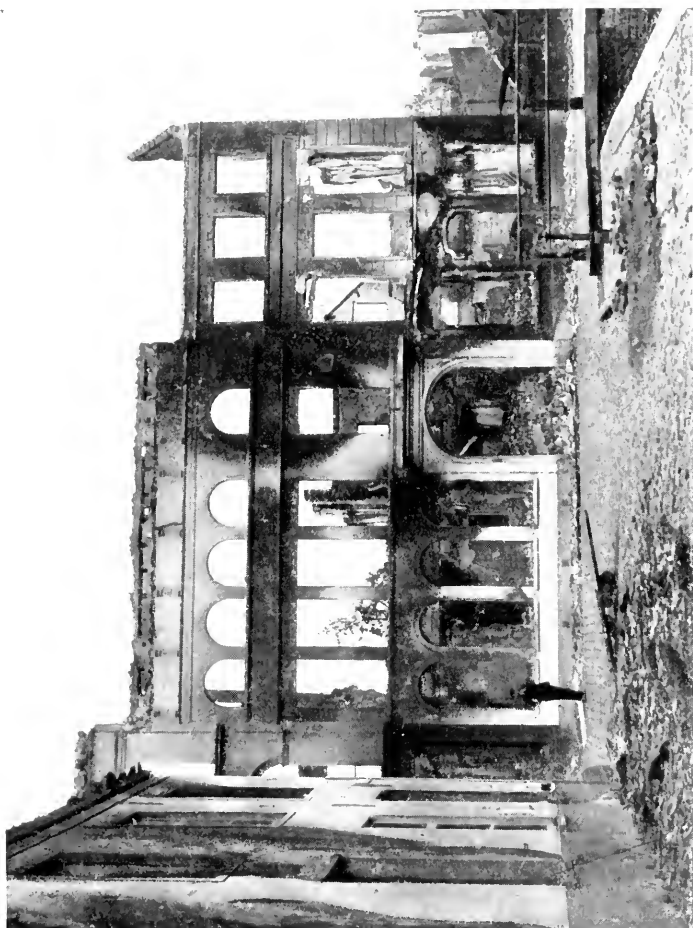
across the water, so that it was impossible to cross it to the other side. At the corner of the street, on our left, was a big café—a three-storied building. Every window and door had a *matelasse* of pillows and mattresses. The house was still occupied by Belgian Chasseurs, who were even at that time on the alert. The officer in charge, a smart young lieutenant, was at one of the upper windows scanning the opposite shore of the canalised Dendre through his field-glasses.

Slowly the people from the houses on the other side of the water, and especially from a big building on the left, began to come out. Then scared and panic-stricken women, old men and children, began to run wildly from all directions towards the drawn bridge to try in their excitement to come towards the centre of the town, where they thought they would be much safer. The lieutenant, however, thought it was not yet advisable to re-establish the communications between the two sides of the river.

Further down, on our right, a big factory was on fire. The lieutenant had come down from his upper window and out to where we were. He told us that the burning building was a rubber factory which the Germans had set fire to with their shelling.

People still flocked towards the bridge and also farther down the canal to where several barges and a big tug lay opposite one another, fastened to both sides of the water. From where we stood on the top of the car we could see dead





Termonde. "Outer walls only remained standing."



bodies lying in all directions in the opposite end of the street. We went down to the bank of the canal, on our right, and managed to slacken the stern of one of the lighters. We got on board this and pushed with a long pole against the side of the tug so that we were able to swing the barge across the water. Then we managed to clamber on to the opposite shore.

The poor people who were standing here, with haggard faces and trembling limbs, immediately saw their opportunity of escape, and began to cross the water in the same way that we had done. Poor old women were helped from the quay-side on to the lighter, which was then pushed towards the other bank. On reaching it many of them collapsed in the dust. To see the utter despair and the panic-stricken faces of these usually calm, peaceful townspeople was heart-rending. Up to now the Germans had left them and their town practically unmolested. They had had a great sense of security owing to the comparative unimportance of Alost. Now they had been aroused from their peaceful state. Some of these old folks, in their quite pathetic *naïveté*, asked us if we could tell them at what time they could get a train to Brussels or Ghent! As if the Germans had not for a long time held the entire railway system of that part of the country!

We walked along to the spot where we had seen the dead men. Then we came upon a gruesome scene. Straight as we stepped in on our

left lay the body of a young man, cleanly dressed in a grey suit, with a somewhat clerical appearance about him. He was lying flat down on his right cheek with his two hands about his neck. His face was blue and cold. We turned the body over and found two wounds in it. One was a bullet hole. The other was a terrible gash made by a bayonet thrust from behind. The torn clothes at the back between the shoulder-blades had been ripped by a saw-edged bayonet used by the Germans.

We found out later what had happened. Not an hour before we reached the banks of the Dendre the Germans had made an effort to storm the town from the direction of the side of the river on which we now were standing. From the neighbouring villages and suburbs of Alost they had gathered together a number of civilians and had forced them to march in front of them when they came round a corner towards the open bridge. Just before they came into view of the bridge, the Germans had gathered together in compact masses behind the corner of the street, and then, when they were ready to advance, they pushed the civilians before them, making them walk with their arms raised up.

The Belgian snipers and sharpshooters ambuscaded in the big corner café on the city side held their fire for a while when they saw the shield the Germans were so dastardly using. It was impossible at first to shoot without killing their own countrymen. When the civilians had

advanced nearer, the Belgians motioned to them and called out to them to fall down at once. But the poor wretches either did not understand what they were asked to do or were afraid to do it.

When the column of Germans had advanced far enough to expose the rear part of it, the Belgian mitrailleuses opened fire on them at once, shooting down the soldiers at the back of the column. As soon as fire was opened the Germans shot and bayoneted the civilians in front and then began to answer the shooting of the ambuscaded Belgian marksmen. But their position was untenable. Taken in enfilade by the Belgians, they soon littered the street with their men. The rest of the column, seeing the hopelessness of the success of their attempt, fled back to the safety of the curve, and were soon leaving the town. But before they went they set fire to a row of small houses in one of the side streets. The bodies of the dead civilians lay around where we stood. The short end of the street was so splashed with blood and littered with weapons and discarded equipment as to be nauseating. A few steps away from the dead youth, near the curbstone of the pavement at the left-hand side, lay a white-haired old man of about sixty years of age. He was dressed in a plain black suit, over which was the jumper of the working man. He lay flat on his back, his arms still raised above his head, his hands clenched. The faces of the old man and the youth were both calm.

There were none of the terrible agonised looks I have seen in the faces of dead men. Both must have died almost instantaneously. The old man had similar wounds to the young one—he had been shot and bayoneted in the back.

Across the street again lay another body. This was a butcher, who had also been killed outright. He wore the blue and white checkered jumper of his trade. He was lying face upwards; his arms were also raised above his head. Strange to say, he was in his stocking feet and he wore no hat, nor was there one lying near him. His face was veined with yellow and blue stripes, and the big, glazed, open eyes were still showing an expression of horror and an indescribable look of hate. This latter was accentuated by the man's teeth, which showed below his drawn upper lip.

This man had been pierced with a bayonet in front. We examined the poor body. In the left breast pocket of his jumper the man had kept his best briar pipe in a wooden case, along with a box of matches and other things. Now, to show how terribly brutal had been the attack on these poor innocent men, we noticed that this man had been struck exactly on the spot where the briar pipe in its wooden case was kept. Both were shattered to fragments before the steel of the saw-edged bayonet reached the man's heart and killed him immediately.

Still farther on was another middle-aged civilian lying dead against the wall, with his face turned

towards it. He also was bootless and hatless. He lay heaped up like a bundle of rags. He had been shot and stabbed in the side. Then farther along, behind the bend of the street, on the left, we found more dead civilians, who had apparently crawled there and died of their wounds.

Everywhere from near the edge of the canal to far behind the bend lay dead Germans. We found them at every step. They lay in their dirty grey uniforms in twos and threes. Near the body of the murdered old white-haired man was one dead German who must have been killed quite instantaneously. He was lying on his back in a position of rest. He had fallen so that he lay with legs crossed and arms across his breast. His rifle and bayonet had been taken away by the retreating enemy.

He had an enormous head and was wearing an equally enormous helmet. Straight in front of this, at the exact spot where the Iron Cross is very often attached to the brass plate of the helmet, a bullet from a machine gun had entered and burst the skull. It was a horrifying sight. But what is an extraordinary fact and a mystery to us is this: in the man's right hand, still held by the stiff, dead fingers, was a bar of chocolate. . . . How can one explain the mystery of this? The man had been marching towards the Belgians, not many yards away, and yet he had the chocolate in his trigger hand.

At the corner of the street, amongst the dead bodies of three Germans, we found the big, broad,

leather belt of a portable mitrailleuse gun which they had brought with them but had had no opportunity to use.

I have mentioned the use of saw-edged bayonets by the Germans, and I have also said that the rifles and bayonets of the dead men had been removed by their comrades in the retreat. But we received some German bayonets later on. They had been taken off the rifles of dead Germans in the vicinity. They were all saw-edged. One of them is lying on my desk in front of me now as I write. It is a murderous, terrible-looking weapon with a sharp saw edge on the underside right up to the point.

All during this time the flock of panic-stricken refugees was passing us in frantic haste. Little children in tears clung to the skirts of their mothers who were sweating and panting under the loads of the few belongings they had managed to bundle up and save. They hurried along the street, stepping over the dead bodies and the sticky, dark patches in the roadway, unconcerned by the horrors of the surroundings in their own intense anxiety to get across the canal and behind the protecting guns of the few Belgians who had just repulsed the enemy. One little girl had fallen down beside a pool of blood. Her white dress was stained red-brown; it was still wet. Her appearance was weird.

The Belgian lieutenant by this time was very much concerned by the number of people who were gathered together on the opposite bank



of the canal. He was also aware of the danger of them crossing the canal by means of the lighter, as in their haste many of them had narrow escapes from falling into the water. Reluctantly he decided to swing the bridge round again so that the people could cross in safety. He did this and sent off a number of cyclist scouts after the Germans, at the same time ordering all his men to remain more than ever on the alert.

The poor people simply rushed across the bridge—a struggling mass of terrorised humanity. Their mental sufferings were awful to witness. We saw a scene which brought tears to our eyes. We had not thought it possible to cry again. We had grown hardened to the horrors of the terrible war. We had looked on death in all its forms and had remained dry-eyed.

A Belgian chasseur was posted at the corner of the bridge with a few men to open it in case of danger appearing in the shape of returning Germans. An old man, with tottering gait, and dressed in the nice, clean, old-fashioned clothes of many years gone by, came across the bridge. In his hand he held an ivory-handled walking-stick, on which he leant and with which he was tapping sharply the wooden planks to help him along. At his other side was a young, handsome girl, who was guiding him amongst the surging, running crowd. Her strong young arm with her fine firm brown hand was round the old man's shoulder. She was protecting him as a mother would protect her child.

When the old man came near the chasseur he went up to him and, raising his trembling hands, he seized the hard, rough hand of the young soldier and kissed it. Then in a cracked, tremulous voice he thanked him for having saved them.

“Oh, dank U! Dank U!” he cried.

The chasseur, somewhat uneasy and embarrassed, was touched by the heart-felt show of confidence and gratitude. He tried to draw his hand away, but the poor old gentleman clung to it, just as a child would hold its parent's hand to quiet its fears. And the piteous old fellow repeated in his trembling, weak voice, “Oh, dank U! Dank U!” It was all that he could say.

And the young girl. . . . She still had her strong brown hand on the old man's shoulder, but she had her head turned round so that she was gazing across the water and down the street from which they had come. Her big, dark eyes were gleaming with fire. Her head was thrown slightly back so that the fine shaped neck and throat were seen. Her mouth was firmly, defiantly shut. The dormancy of the mother spirit was gone. She was as the female animal defending its young. She would have fought if need had been. Had the grey-clad men come on us at that moment, they would have had to pass her dead body to reach the old gentleman. And before that, Albert and the chasseur and I would have fallen.

No words of mine can tell the misery of all

this flight. No one who has not seen what we have seen can realise the tragedy of it all. The horrors of war are not always the horrors of the battlefield. The terrors of Death are sometimes no more great than the terrors of Life. How can I describe the pathos of these homeless people flying before the advance of a ruthless enemy? Old folks had fled from the hearths at which they had planned to spend the evening of their days. Little homes that were the outcome of long years of toil were left behind for ever. Penniless, poor folks were being driven from the land they loved to seek a refuge in another country. Almost every family mourned its dead. The future was unknown. Even hope seemed to die in the breasts of the stricken people.

People in England do not know what war means. The "silver streak" denies them knowledge. Murder and arson and rape are but mere nouns. One reads of them in every newspaper. Their daily use has minimised their terror. But we who have seen—we know. And in our hearts and minds are memories we cannot forget. Details, too—the checkered jumper of the butcher, the splintered briar pipe, the murdered youth's clean grey suit, the bar of chocolate in the dead man's hand—all these come vividly to mind, fraught with the horrors of the scene and circumstances.

When most of the people had come across the bridge, the young lieutenant sent some mounted scouts in the direction of the Porte de Bruxelles

on the opposite bank, towards the burning factory. We went with some of the soldiers and laid the dead civilians on the pavement at the side of the street for the time being. Then the officer in charge of the guides called us to him and asked us to take a message to the headquarters at Termonde.

At this moment some of the mounted scouts returned to the bridge and reported an advancing party of about two hundred German soldiers, who were coming from the direction of Brussels towards the embankment road of the Dendre. The bridge was opened again so that it swung round across the water and shut off communication from the other side. We had to proceed at once to Termonde with the officer's message.

This was, as I have said, a glorious, sunshiny day—calm and clear overhead. And that evening, when we got to Antwerp, we found the cafés thronged with people. Family parties sat around the little tables, smoking and drinking and talking hopefully.

There are so many contrasts in time of war.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE GERMAN PROCLAMATIONS

**R**EGARDING the atrocities committed by the Germans, much has been said in Berlin and other towns by way of excuse. The columns of the *Zeitung* and other official newspapers have devoted much space to these excuses. It has been stated, for instance, that any barbarities that have taken place have been the acts of individual soldiers, for whom the officers in command were not responsible. There are good men and bad in every army, say the German professors who have issued reports on their alleged investigations.

But that the destruction of towns and the murder of innocent civilians have been carried out under the orders of the commanding officers is proved by the many proclamations that have been issued throughout Belgium. These notices are a mixture of lies and threats. Some are simply lies ; others solely threats.

One of the first German proclamations issued by the Germans in Belgium was posted up in Liège and district on August 22. Here is a translation of the notice, which was printed in not altogether correct French :—

“TO THE BELGIAN PEOPLE !

“ It is to my very great regret that the German troops have been compelled to cross the frontier of Belgium. They acted under the constraint of an inevitable necessity, the neutrality of Belgium having been already violated by French officers who, under disguise, had crossed the Belgian territory in motor-cars in order to penetrate into Germany.

“ Belgians ! It is our greatest wish that there will still be a means to avoid a combat between two peoples who have been friends up to the present, and even Allies in time gone by. Remember the glorious day of Waterloo when it was the German armies who helped to found and establish the independence and prosperity of your country.

“ But we must have a free passage. The destruction of bridges, tunnels and railways will be regarded as hostile acts. Belgians, you have to choose.

“ I hope then that the German army of the Meuse will not be compelled to fight you. A free passage to attack the one who wishes to attack us—that is all that we desire.

“ I give FORMAL GUARANTEES to the Belgian population that they will have none of the horrors of war to suffer : that WE WILL PAY IN MINTED GOLD for the food that we will have to take from the country : that all soldiers will show themselves the best friends of the people for whom we feel the highest esteem and the greatest sympathy.

# Au Peuple Belge!

C'est à mon plus grand regret que les troupes Allemandes se voient forcées de franchir la frontière de la Belgique. Elles agissent sous la contrainte d'une nécessité inévitable la neutralité de la Belgique ayant été déjà violée par des officiers français qui, sous un déguisement, aient traversé le territoire belge en automobile pour pénétrer en Allemagne.

Belges! C'est notre plus grand désir qu'il y ait encore moyen d'éviter un combat entre deux peuples qui étaient amis jusqu'à présent, jadis même alliés. Souvenez vous du glorieux jour de Waterloo ou c'étaient les armes allemandes qui ont contribué à fonder et établir l'indépendance et la prospérité de votre patrie.

Mais il nous faut le chemin libre. Des destructions de ponts, de tunnels, de voies ferrées devront être regardées comme des actions hostiles. Belges, vous avez à choisir.

J'espère donc que l'Armée allemande de la Meuse ne sera pas contrainte de vous attaquer. Un chemin libre pour attaquer celui qui voulait nous attaquer, c'est tout ce nous désirons.

Je donne des **garanties formelles** à la population belge qu'elle n'aura à souffrir des horreurs de la guerre; que nous **payerons en monnaie** les vases qu'il faudra prendre du pays; que nos soldats se conduiront comme des hommes et non pas comme des bêtes; que nous éprouverons la plus haute estime pour votre système.

**C'est de votre sagesse et d'un patriotisme bien compris qu'il dépend d'éviter à votre pays les horreurs de la guerre.**

Le Général Commandant en Chef l'Armée de la Meuse  
**von Emmich.**





“IT DEPENDS ON YOUR WISDOM AND PATRIOTISM WELL UNDERSTOOD WHETHER YOU AVOID THE HORRORS OF WAR IN YOUR COUNTRY.

“The General Gommader in Chief of the Army of the Meuse.

“VON EMMICH.”

Comment on that proclamation is unnecessary.

On August 17, the following poster was issued by the Burgomaster of Hasselt:—

“DEAR CITIZENS,—

“With the accord of the High German Military Authorities, I have the honour to recommend you again to restrain from any provoking manifestations or any acts of hostility which would bring on our city terrible reprisals.

“You will abstain from any acts against the German troops and especially from firing on them.

“In case the inhabitants of our city should shoot on the soldiers of the German army, one-third of the male population will be immediately shot down.

“Bear in mind that the gathering together of more than five people is strictly forbidden and that the people who contravene this prohibition will be immediately arrested.

“Hasselt, August 17, 1914.

“The Burgomaster,

“FERD. PORTMANS.”

At Namur, on August 25, the proclamation was as follows:—

“1. The Belgian and French soldiers must be delivered as prisoners of war before four o'clock in front of the prison. Citizens who do not obey will be condemned to hard labour for life in Germany. A rigorous inspection of houses will commence at four o'clock. Every soldier found will be immediately shot.

“2. Arms, powder and dynamite must be handed over by four o'clock. Penalty for not doing so : Shot dead.

“Citizens knowing of the deposits of such things must tell the Burgomaster, under penalty of hard labour for life.

“3. Every street will be occupied by a German guard, who will take ten hostages from each street, whom they will keep under surveillance. If there is any rising in the street the ten hostages will be shot.

“4. Doors must not be locked. From eight o'clock at night, three windows must be lit in each house.

“5. It is forbidden for citizens to be in the streets after eight o'clock. The people of Namur must understand that there is no greater or more horrible crime than to do anything contrary to the welfare of the German army.

“The Commander of the Town,

“VON BULOW.

“Namur, August 25, 1914. Printers : Chantaine.”

Here again is a letter addressed on August 27 by

Lieutenant-General von Nieber to the Burgomaster of Wavre :—

“ On August 22, 1914, the General Commander of the Second Army, Marshal von Bulow, imposed on the town of Wavre a war contribution of three millions of francs to be paid before September 1, to expiate the unqualified behaviour against the laws of war of its population who attacked the Germans by surprise.

“ The General Commander of the Second Army has just given to the General second in command of the said army the order to levy without delay the said contribution, which has to be paid as a penalty for the above-mentioned behaviour of its population.

“ I order you imperatively to pay to the bearer of this the two first ‘ quotes parts,’ i.e., two millions of francs in gold.

“ I order you also to give the bearer a letter duly sealed with the seal of the town, declaring that the remainder, i.e., one million francs, will be paid on September 1.

“ I draw your attention to the point that no delay will be allowed, and the civilian population of the town will be considered as outlaws, for the fact that they have been shooting on German soldiers.

*“ The town of Wavre will be burnt and destroyed if the payment does not take place at the appointed time, without any regard for persons. The innocent will suffer with the guilty.*

“ (Signed) LIEUT.-GEN. VON NIEBER.”

At Wavre, fifty houses were burned. The Germans took as hostages an alderman, the councillors and a priest from Basse-Wavre.

A proclamation of seventeen clauses, signed "Dieckmann, Commandant-Major," was posted up in Grivegnée on September 8. The following are the most striking clauses :—

"From the list which is submitted to me I will designate persons who shall be hostages from mid-day till the following midday. If the substitute is not there at the correct time, the hostage must remain another twenty-four hours at the fort. After these twenty-four hours the hostage will incur the penalty of death, if the substitute has not presented himself.

"I insist that all civilians who move about in my district, particularly those of Beyne-Heusay, Fléron, Bois-de-Breux, and Grivegnée, show their respect to the German officers by taking off their hats, or lifting their hands to their heads in military salute. In case of doubt, every German soldier must be saluted. Any one who disregards this must expect the military to make themselves respected by any means.

"Any one who does not obey the order 'Hands up' makes himself guilty (*sic*) of the penalty of death.

"Entrance to the Chateau des Bruyères, and also of the drives in the park, is forbidden under penalty of death between dusk and dawn, between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. (German time), to all persons who are not soldiers of the German army.

“Whoever, by spreading false news, liable to lower the moral of the German troops, and whoever makes any plans directed against the German army, will be a suspect, and runs the risk of being shot on the spot.

“Whoever injures or attempts to injure the German army by taking advantage of the Red Cross Flag, and is discovered, will be hanged.”

When Termonde was ordered to surrender on September 4, the note, signed Von Boehn, contained the following :—

“The Germans have captured Termonde. We have placed all round the town siege artillery of the largest calibre. Even now people dare to shoot from houses on the German troops. The town and the fortress are summoned to hoist the white flag immediately and to cease fighting. If you do not agree to this summons the town will be razed in a quarter of an hour by a very heavy bombardment.”

A striking feature of the proclamations is that they grow steadily more inhuman, exhibiting lust of blood, a desire for wanton destruction, and a reckless disregard of the rights of admittedly innocent persons. Here is a portion of the notice posted in Brussels on October 5, and signed by Baron von der Goltz :—

“During the evening of September 25 the railway line and the telegraph wires were destroyed

on the line Lovenjoul—Vertryck. In consequence of this these two localities have had to render an account of this and had to give hostages in the morning of September 30.

“In future the localities nearest to the place where similar acts take place will be punished without pity. It matters little if they are accomplices or not. For this purpose hostages have been taken from all localities near the railway line thus menaced, and at the first attempt to destroy the railway line or the telephone or telegraph wires they will be immediately shot.”

These proclamations contain the bluntly-stated intention of sacking and burning towns and murdering civilians on no pretext whatever but the absolute fancy of the individual commanders of the German Army.

## CHAPTER XIX

### WAELEHEM

ANTWERP, I thought, was impregnable. Outlying suburbs had been razed to the ground so that the big guns of the forts could have free play. Trees had been cut down and barricades built across the roads with their trunks. Barbed wire entanglements had been stretched across the fields, wire fencings had been electrified with a death-dealing voltage, pits had been dug and wooden spikes placed in them, mines had been laid in road and field, and great stretches of country had been rendered impassable by flooding. There were canals, also, that had to be crossed—and finally, there were forts of great strength to face the foe.

But big guns laugh at fences. They also laugh at—forts. Water and wire and fallen wood lie useless under the shrieking passage of a shell. Taubes laugh at spike-filled holes; cavalry are not needed in the taking of a town. The day of battle-horses, thank God, will soon be past.

Within two weeks' of my return from Alost, Antwerp fell; the bombardment of the outer forts commenced next day, while I, in my confidence of Antwerp's impregnability, was on my

way to Malines and to an expected run along the Brussels road.

Between the little village and the fort of Waelhem there is an open stretch of highway that runs straight to the fort, then to the right in a huge half-circle—an interrogation mark of road with Waelhem village as the dot. It was while the car was crossing this open stretch that a huge shell thudded into the field on the left. This shell was the beginning of the end of Antwerp. I did not know that then, but we turned the car and ran it back to the shelter of a house that stood less than two hundred yards back of the fort.

Behind us, in the village, folks were fleeing for their lives. Little cherished belongings were being hastily gathered together; front doors were locked—one blow would knock them in!—and men and women and children hurried off in the direction of Antwerp. That evening, by the way, I saw most of them only a mile or so up the road, waiting in the hopes of being able to return to their homes. One old woman stood alone with her parrot in a cage. It was all she had taken with her. In front of us, across the open stretch of road, cavalry came hurrying past—and transport wagons and empty Red Cross carts and cars. The Belgian army had retired to within the outer line of Antwerp's forts. Beyond this were the busy Germans and their powerful guns.

A prodigality of shells fell in the field behind





“One old woman managed to save her parrot.”

*Facing page 218.*



the fort. Some landed without exploding. Others fell short and burst in front of their target. We could see the cloud of earth thrown up beyond the top of the fortress bank. Two priests and a cyclist soldier joined us as we stood behind the house's side. At intervals the whistling came eddying through the sky—a thud—a dull explosion—a cloud of earth and smoke. We stood pressed to the wall—the priests' lips moving in a silent prayer. It is possible to see the shells come. The soldier said one could dodge them. But none of us looked up when the whistle came.

There followed some minutes of quiet. We looked around. There was a garden wall that ran along the road. Over it were roses—beautiful red and white roses. These, at least, the Germans must not have! Two of us clambered up the wall and dropped into the garden at the other side. We plucked a bunch of blooms and then climbed back. We sniffed the roses' perfume and held them for the priests to smell. Then the shrapnel burst above. We threw ourselves full length into the shelter of the wall's foot, lay for a moment, then rose up to our feet unscathed. In my hand I held a bunch of headless stalks. Crushed petals, red and white, lay on the ground.

The calm of the past few minutes was the calm before the storm. Shrapnel was bursting in the field in front. Some minutes later a shell threw up the flower-bed in the garden; another landed where our car had stood. But we were off to Antwerp, the priests with us, the cyclist pedalling

in the rear. We laughed, because Fort Waelhem was intact. But that was for the day only. The Germans got the range and a shell pierced through a solid mass of masonry and earth, killed eight men and wounded many more. Five days later the forts were useless, and within another week we had crossed the Scheldt, refugees ourselves, fleeing before the advent of the grey-clad men. . . .

From the beginning of the war Waelhem had for us a magical significance. Its fort was the largest and strongest on the outer line of the forts that defended the approach to Antwerp. In appearance—as seen casually from the road—it was a great, long, green mound. With a giant headstone at either of its ends, it might have been what it turned out to be—a huge grave. But we never thought of it as anything but a fort of great strength.

Waelhem itself is only a big village on the winding river Dyle that runs S-shape towards the Scheldt. But the fort—the key of all the line of forts—was perfectly built. It had enormously thick cupolas, armed with enormously strong guns. Around it, moreover, were barbed wire fences, and along the road to Malines, which lay seven kilometres to the south, were more entanglements and carefully-placed mines.

Just as many of the suburbs of Antwerp had been razed to the ground, so had all the houses on the southerly side of Waelhem for a distance of two miles been knocked down. All trees had also been laid low. The approaches on both

sides of the road were a maze of trenches leading in all directions and forming the defence between the different forts of the ring.

I have sat in a motor-car less than a hundred yards in front of the Fort and I've seen the white clouds of smoke come puffing out, and I've heard the deafening clap of the gun's report. And always we felt secure. We would cry, "Bonne chance!" to each departing shell, and we'd say to it, "Kill them—damn them!—kill them!"

That is how we felt.

When the Germans had shelled Malines, they had done so with the apparent intention of frightening the population and driving them away to Antwerp, where their presence would so greatly augment the population of the already crowded city as to render living impossible owing to lack of food. Up to now they had used comparatively small guns, and their fire, although murderous enough, had caused damage that was not entirely irreparable.

The reason why small guns only had been used is not to be discussed. The probable *motif* is that the big 42-centimetre Austrian guns had not yet reached Hofstade, which place had been the position of the German guns for some time. Some of the Belgian peasants we met in Malines between the second and third bombardment of that city have told us that while the Germans had compelled them to make trenches at Willebroeck and Sempst, they had seen the Germans at Hofstade reinforcing an artificial floor with

cement and concrete, for a base for big guns of whose presence we were now to know.

So it came about that on September 28, when everybody in Antwerp was still most confident in the way the city would be able to stand a siege of months: when every housewife had laid in a plentiful supply of provisions for the coming winter season: when anyone who had dared to question the strength of that grim, green-grassed outer line of forts, would have been sneered at as a fool for his ignorance—on the morning of that day the concrete floors for the big 42-centimetre Austrian guns had been completed, and shells of a ton weight were leaving the heavy howitzers to do to Waelhem what they had already done to Liège and Namur and Maubeuge.

And, as I have said, it was while we were on our way to Malines that the first of the shells fell. We returned to Waelhem the next day, and we saw the much-discussed effects of the heavy shells.

At first Waelhem answered shot for shot. The fort was connected by telephone with the observation post of Elsenstraat, which was able to give Commandant Dewit the position of the German batteries. At about four o'clock in the afternoon—four hours after the bombardment commenced—a shell broke this telephone connection and Fort Waelhem had to guess more or less the enemy's position. During the evening one of the 15-centimetre cupolas was badly hit and was put out of working order.

Next day Fort Waelhem kept firing away without interruption, while the Germans were specially bent on crippling the fort of Wavre Sainte Catherine. At about twelve o'clock, mid-day, the telephone connection between Waelhem and the spire of Elsenstraat was re-established. Directly after this the fort found the range of the German batteries located in the manœuvring field of Malines on the left of the road. The enemy was then using the heavy field artillery to supplement the bigger howitzers of Hofstade. They were shooting every three minutes, and they hit the 15-centimetre cupola, which had been repaired immediately the day before, with picrite shells.

Fort Waelhem kept answering. Commandant Dewit himself stood at the telephone receiver. At four o'clock he sent a message that a second cupola was out of work. Since three o'clock he had been shelling the railway line where the observation post had reported the movement of the troops, and he was able in this way to cut all communication on the way to Louvain. At half-past four, Commandant Dewit called for help. An explosion in a magazine had badly burnt seventy-five men.

On this, the second, day of the bombardment we had returned to Waelhem and had run our car behind another house. The one behind which we had stood the day before was wrecked. The German fire for the main part had been very wide. But some German officers climbed up to the top

of Malines Cathedral tower, which had not been knocked down, and from there were able to have the correct range given. The previous day Fort Waelhem itself had tried to knock down the already badly battered tower so as to prevent it being used as an observation post.

Then followed better marksmanship. Some shells fell in the Fort's ditches, sending high columns of water into the air. Some still fell into the fields, where they made deep holes and threw up volcano-like showers of earth. Many of these heavy shells never exploded at all. They fell with a thud into the ground and disappeared with hardly any earth being thrown up. And at the same time shrapnel shells were bursting all around the forts and the trenches and the fields. The air was full of little fleecy, death-dealing clouds.

While we were standing there listening to the whistling and shrieking of the shells, we saw smoke issuing from the inner entrance to the fort and men hurrying about and *estafettes* leaving *ventre à terre*. We could see that something had gone wrong inside.

A big shell fell on the road near us, on the railway line of the "Chemin de fer Vicinal," and left a gaping hole with the two twisted broken rails sticking up in the air like the arms of a drowning man.

The first *estafette* passed us and we yelled a question at him. He stopped at once with a hurried word, pointed to the fort, and was off



again. We jumped in the car and went off at full speed across the open space of the highway in a perfect hail of shrapnel, and with heavy shells falling nearer and nearer every minute.

At the main gate, soldiers lowered the iron draw-bridge over the moat and we ran into the second *enceinte*. There was no challenge to us. The Red Cross flag was sufficient. A Red Cross car was needed. The fort had been hit severely at last.

One of the big German shells had pierced about sixteen feet of earthen upper works and ten feet of heavy concrete inner roof. In bursting it had set fire to a compartment of one of the powder magazines, as the men told us. The effect had been disastrous to the Belgian soldiers. Eight had been killed outright and about seventy others had been badly injured.

Some of the men were terribly wounded. Some were badly burnt—with great deep sores in their bodies. Some had been struck blind. One man had his arms and legs so badly mangled that we could not move or even touch him. The sight was terrible. We got some of the wounded put into the car. And the German shells fell relentlessly and unceasingly on Waelhem, the key of Antwerp—the Fort we relied so much on. The road to the north, right up to Waerloos, was being swept by shrapnel.

At the same time the Germans were shelling the Fort of Wavre Sainte Catherine, which was holding on bravely, but suffering much more

than Waelhem and its valiant Commandant Dewit.

Other Red Cross cars and doctors arrived and proceeded to carry out the wounded. Albert in the meantime went, with a lieutenant in attendance, to the magazine where the explosion had occurred. Here, amongst the broken concrete and debris, he picked up a piece of the monster shell, which he put in the motor-car and took away with him as a gruesome souvenir.

As soon as all the cars were loaded with wounded men, and as the hail of steel showed no signs of lessening, we started one after the other to leave the cover of the fort at full speed, running across the open space, then through the deserted, smouldering main streets of the village, across the last bridge over the Dyle, which had been mined and was ready to be blown up at a moment's notice, then right up to the top and behind the first declivity of the road. We were in the first three cars and we had no mishap during this spurt. One of the other cars, however, had one of its rear wheels cut with shrapnel and also had its petrol tank burst. The men were put on an ambulance wagon which came on the scene.

We arrived in Waerloos, where our wounded men were transferred to the military ambulances. We then went off to Antwerp to report to the Croix Rouge, while the Fort of Waelhem was undergoing its death agonies.

When the explosion deprived Commandant Dewit of seventy-five men, he telephoned to Duffel for help, and asked urgently that the eighth



Earth thrown up behind bush by a German shell. This photograph was taken by the author under fire at Fort Waelhem. Wavre St. Catherine in the distance.



battery would fire in his place while the Red Cross were taking away his wounded men. Help came at last, and the fort remained silent until next day. The observation point of Elsenstraat, seeing the movements of troops, asked the fort to fire. Waelhem's short, distressed reply was, "Impossible."

The post of Elsenstraat was bombarded at half-past six, and the observers and range-finders had to leave it. Waelhem could get no further news of the enemy's movements. During the night Commandant Dewit managed to patch up a few cupolas and put them in firing order. He then shot a few rounds, the range being roughly estimated.

The next day, September 30, the cupolas having been put right, the fort continued firing while the Belgian troops in the trenches retreated and were replaced by fresh men. But Fort Waelhem had to sustain a very heavy fire from the enemy. The concrete work was demolished. Holes, ten feet in extent, were made in the cupolas, which were again put out of order. Some one said a second explosion had occurred.

Commandant Dewit gathered his men and prepared for the final attack. The bridge over the Dyle was blown up and all communications cut. It has been said that on the Friday, October 2, Commandant Dewit gave leave to all his men, who saved themselves by crossing the Dyle in small boats. Four men remained, however, and with them the Commandant stayed in his dis-

abled fort and pointed a last gun on the advancing enemy.

That is the story of Fort Waelhem and its gallant defenders. Commandant Dewit was made a Knight of the Order of Leopold by the King on the day before the fort was blown up by its own last defenders.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE NAVAL BRIGADE

THERE were six first-class naval gunners from Whale Island in Antwerp. Every day these men went out on the armoured train and did splendid work. Almost every night they returned to town leaving a good bag of Germans behind them. And very often they got up from their beds at twelve o'clock midnight, after a very few hours' rest, and set off on night attacks.

I know this, because the six gunners and myself stayed for a time at the same hotel in the Avenue de Keyser, and I used to see them having hot tea at midnight before setting out again, and they would go off cheerfully to battle while I went grudgingly to bed. I would dearly have liked a trip on that train.

Sometimes telephone messages came through for these gunners—when they were in bed. On these occasions a very worried waiter and a very worried *femme de chambre* would come to my room in great excitement and beg me to translate the message to the Englishmen upstairs. Of course I was always flattered at the compliment the hotel servants paid me, for my French is—well, not good. Their French, moreover, was also not exactly pure, but I managed somehow or other to understand what they said and I would go up and waken

one of the tired gunners and give him the telephone instructions. I was always a little worried about this—because I might easily have made a mistake and upset the military plans. However, all went well as far as I know.

There was also a number of Royal Naval Flying men in the town. But what the people wearied for was the sight of men in khaki marching through the streets.

“ When are the English coming ? ”

In these later days in and around Antwerp, that was the question every soldier asked. Then one night the English came. It was the Saturday before the end, and the men arrived late at night. Not the khaki-clad soldiers for whom the crowd had longed, but two thousand capable-looking men of the Naval Brigade. There were a very few men in khaki also—and there was Mr. Winston Churchill.

Rumours of the approaching arrival of the British troops had gone round the town all day. Every one was in a state of great excitement. The last boats for England were said to be leaving that afternoon. English residents rushed to arrange their passages. The Government were packing up for Ostend. But—the English were coming. That was the most important fact of all.

Between five o'clock and six that afternoon I was standing in the Place Verte, in front of the Taverne Royal, with four Englishmen. A motor car came along from the Saint Antoine Hotel and turned round in the square opposite to where





British sailors and Belgians erecting barbed wire entanglements to hinder the advance of the Germans on Antwerp.



we stood. And in the car, in Trinity House uniform, was Mr. Winston Churchill.

Of course we recognised him. And we cheered until we were hoarse. And we called out in chorus—"Good—old—Winnie!" And he saluted in acknowledgment of our cheers and waved his hand before he disappeared in the direction of the Place de Meir.

Now, that shout of "Winnie" was the greatest compliment we could pay the First Lord. It may seem to savour of the diminutive, but it in no way lessened our respect for Mr. Churchill. It is significant of his popularity—for the word "Winnie" came from the five of us spontaneously and almost unconsciously. I do not think there is another Minister whom we would refer to by the use of his Christian name alone. "Winston" is just "Winston."

Winston Churchill was the oasis in all that desert of gloomy faces. He was the biggest newspaper story of the war. (How the pressmen cursed the censor!) His presence in Antwerp cheered us five Britons as much as a battalion of soldiers would have done.

We went into the Taverne Royal. The occasion merited recognition. We drank the First Lord's health. It was then that a khaki-uniformed soldier came in with a Belgian private and sat down next us. The pair could not understand a word of each other's language, but they smiled and toasted each other at the Belgian's expense. We spoke to the English private.

“ Our bloke didn’t ’alf cop it,” he said to us. “ Ought to ’ave bin a heskort for Winston, we did. An’ we were late an’ ’e ’ad to come ’ere without us. Our bloke didn’t ’alf cop it ! ”

There’s popularity for you ! “ Winston ” from the mouth of Private Atkins ! And there’s respect for one’s officer in charge !—“ Our bloke.” I cannot tell you what happened to Mr. Churchill’s escort. I can only say that I have reproduced the English soldier’s remark in as nearly his own vernacular as is possible.

There is one other remark I must record. We were discussing the probable duration of the war. The Belgian soldier, of course, neither spoke nor understood, but he was content to be in the company of a British private. Well, then, we discussed the probable duration of the war. None of us thought three years. The end of next autumn, we declared. Then up spake Thomas Atkins—

“ In my opinion,” said he, “ we’ll be ’ome in time to see the Cup Final.”

At the corner opposite the Saint Antoine Hotel, there was a cigar shop. I went in to buy some cigarettes. The lady of the shop was greatly excited. She had sent cigars to the few English soldiers who had at that time arrived—and Mr. Churchill, she said, had thanked her. She was just as pleased as if a title had been conferred on her.

“ But you are English ? ” she said to me.

I told her I was—it was no use mentioning that I was really Scottish.

“And you wear the Belgian colours?” said she, pointing to the black-yellow-red ribbon in the lapel of my coat.

“In honour of the Belgian soldiers,” said I, adding that I had seen so many instances of their bravery.

I really thought the good lady was about to embrace me! She contented herself, however, by giving me a 30-centime cigar as an appreciation of my appreciation.

Of the work of the English troops in Antwerp I cannot speak. They arrived on the Saturday night and on the Sunday morning. I remained in Antwerp all Sunday. On Monday, October 5, I went with Albert to Tournai and did not return until late at night. The next day, Tuesday, I went to Waerloos, where a remnant of the Belgian army remained: and on the Wednesday I left Antwerp—a refugee. But I have before me now a copy of the official despatch from Major-General A. Paris, who commanded the Naval Division at Antwerp, to Field-Marshal Sir John French. In a covering message to the Admiralty, the latter wrote:

“From a comprehensive review of all the circumstances, the force of Marines and Naval Brigades which assisted in the defence of Antwerp was handled by General Paris with great skill and boldness.

“Although the results did not include the actual saving of the fortress, the action of the force under General Paris certainly assisted the Belgian

Army to be withdrawn and to enable it to re-organise and refit.

“The assistance which the Belgian army has rendered throughout the subsequent course of the operations on the canal and the Yser river has been a valuable asset to the Allied cause, and such help must be regarded as an outcome of the intervention of General Paris’ force.”

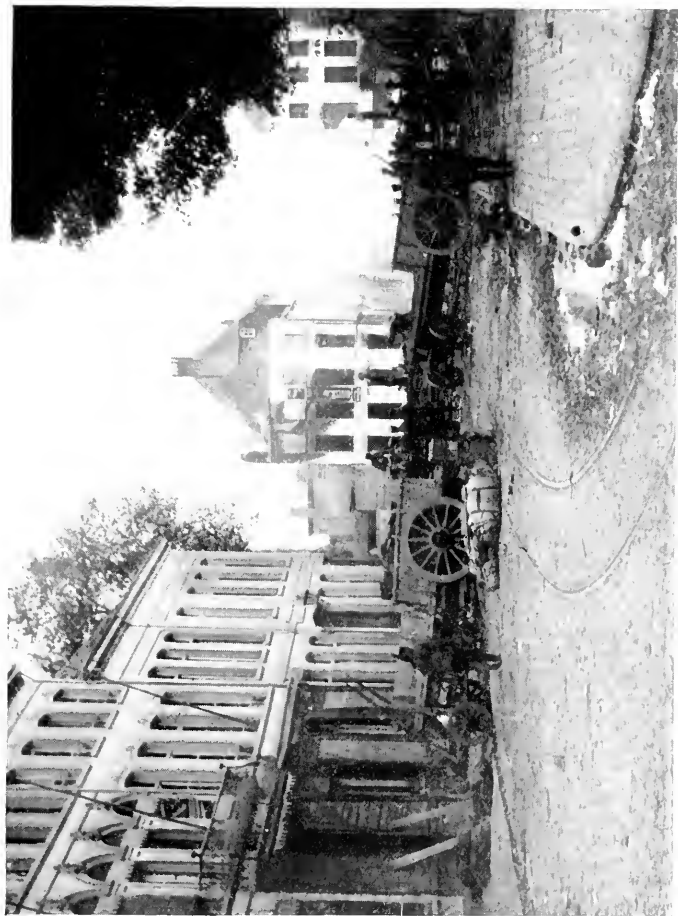
The despatch of Major-General Paris, dated October 31, states :

“The Brigade (2,200 all ranks) reached Antwerp during the night October 3 and 4, and early on the 4th occupied, with the 7th Belgian regiment, the trenches facing Lierre, with advanced post on the river Nethe, relieving some exhausted Belgian troops.

“The outer forts on the front had already fallen, and the bombardment of the trenches increased in violence during the night and early morning of October 5, when the advanced posts were driven in and the enemy effected a crossing of the river.

“About midday the 7th Belgian Regiment was forced to retire, thus exposing my right flank. A vigorous counter-attack gallantly led by Colonel Tierchon, 2nd Chasseurs, assisted by our aeroplanes, restored the position late in the afternoon.

“Unfortunately an attempt made by the Belgian troops during the night (October 5-6) to drive the enemy across the river failed, and resulted in the evacuation of practically the whole of the Belgian trenches.



The Defence of Lierre. British marines waiting for the Germans at the River Nethe, behind a barricade of carts and sandbags.





“The position of the Marine Brigade became untenable, but a retirement was well carried out and soon after midday (October 6) an intermediate position, hastily prepared, was occupied.

“The two Naval Brigades reached Antwerp during the night October 5-6. The 1st Brigade moved out in the afternoon of the 5th to assist the withdrawal to the main second line of defence.

“The retirement was carried out during the night October 6-7, without opposition, and the Naval Division occupied the intervals between the forts on the second line of defence. The bombardment of the town, forts, and trenches began at midnight October 7-8, and continued with increasing intensity until the evacuation of the fortress.

“About 5.30 p.m. on the 8th, I considered that if the Naval Division was to avoid disaster an immediate retirement under cover of darkness was necessary. General De Guise, the Belgian commander, was in complete agreement.

“The retirement began about 7.30 p.m., and was carried out under very difficult conditions. All the roads were crowded with Belgian troops, refugees, herds of cattle, and all kinds of vehicles, making inter-communication a practical impossibility.

“Partly for these reasons, partly on account of fatigue, and partly from at present unexplained causes, large numbers of the 1st Naval Brigade became detached, and I regret to say are either prisoners or interned in Holland.

“ Marching all night, October 8 to 9, one battalion of the 1st Brigade, the 2nd Brigade, and Royal Marine Brigade, less one battalion, entrained at St. Gillies Waes and effected their retreat without further incident. The battalion (Royal Marine Brigade) rearguard of the whole force also entrained late in the afternoon, together with many hundreds of refugees, but at Morbeke the line was cut, the engine derailed, and the enemy opened fire.

“ There was considerable confusion. However, the battalion behaved admirably, and succeeded in fighting its way through, but with a loss in missing of more than half its number. They then marched another ten miles to Selzaate and entrained there.

“ Colonel Seely and Colonel Bridges were not part of my command, but they rendered most skilful and helpful services during the evacuation.

“ An approximate list of casualties follows : 1st Naval Brigade and 2nd Naval Brigade, five killed, sixty-four wounded, 2,040 missing ; Royal Marine Brigade, twenty-three killed, 103 wounded 388 missing.”

## CHAPTER XXI

### TOURNAI

THE arrival of the English troops cheered us up wonderfully. And this in spite of the damaged Waelhem and the now silent fort of Wavre St. Catherine. The gallant Commandant De Wit was still answering shot for shot at the former fort, but the German heavy artillery was shouting down the smaller guns of the Belgians : it was bound to have the last word. But help had come at last. The marines were now at Lierre, strengthening the ranks of the worn-out Belgians in the trenches. And Winston Churchill was in Antwerp. All our hopes and expectations revived.

This was on Sunday, the fourth of October. Rumour also had it that the French had arrived in great numbers on Belgian soil and were hastening to the rescue. We were so anxious to know the truth of this that we made up our minds to go and see. Therefore we arranged to leave Antwerp early next morning and go in the direction of Ghent and Tournai. As it came about, we were really commanded to go there, for our car was commandeered by Commandant X——and a Lieutenant, who wanted to go towards Ghent on a special mission.

Early in the morning of October 5, therefore,

we left Antwerp and went to St. Nicholas, thence to Waesmunster. Commandant X——, who had been on a special mission to the north-west of Belgium, had to rejoin his corps at Wetteren on the line of contact between the German and Belgian forces, about half-way between Antwerp and Ghent. As the roads to that place were very difficult, Albert tried to go by way of Grembergen, a suburb of Termonde. Here we found that things had changed very considerably since our last visit to the district. The Germans were back again in Termonde, where there was nothing more to destroy or burn except the factory of M. Vertongen, which they set on fire as soon as they entered the town again. This factory had been spared on the previous visits of the Germans to Termonde, on account of the kind way in which M. Vertongen had treated the German wounded.

In their retreat, the Belgians had burnt the temporary bridge over the Scheldt, which they themselves had made, to prevent the Germans from advancing across the water. The road from the bridge to the station of Grembergen was being shelled by the enemy, so it was impossible for us to proceed. The river is only about a hundred yards wide here, and the road to Lokeren runs along its bank, so it would have been fatal to expose ourselves to the German fire, as the enemy were shooting at anything they saw from the other side of the Scheldt.

We turned back, therefore, and went by way of the lonely road to Zele and Overmeere to Ghent,



“The Germans burnt the factory of M. Vertongen in Termonde as soon as they re-entered the town.”



where the Commandant had to deliver special instructions. Then, very much on the alert for any signs of the foe, we went back to Wetteren, where the two officers found their corps, right in the line of contact, for the German advance guard were at Melle, where there had been a brisk action that same morning.

Now we were still very keen on finding out if the French really were coming to help Antwerp. There were such persistent rumours. But we had also heard of the Russians,—but never seen them. We were still so determined to find out for ourselves whether the French were in Tournai or not, that we made the maddest trip we had ever run. Choosing a weak spot in the guard lines of the Germans (and we only guessed at its being a weak spot) we crossed their lines at Quatrecht and by way of Scheldewindeke and Sottegem, arrived in Grammont, below Brussels, where the Germans had been in force for the past two months.

The German troops must have been very sparse at this time. So far the roads had been quite free of them and of any signs of them. In Grammont, however, there was quite a number of the enemy. The Burgomaster had been compelled by the German officers to issue orders of requisition. This must have been the reason why the people of the town looked at us in blank astonishment when we rode in, easily and smoothly—because we didn't know at that moment that the Germans occupied the town. The inhabitants also were very reluctant to answer questions.

Grammont is an extraordinary town. It is built on the side of a steep hill. To reach the top of its narrow streets one has almost to crawl. A few yards up the street and one finds the first floor windows of the houses on a level with one's feet! Most of the people—chiefly working classes—had remained in the town. As far as we could see, no buildings or houses had been damaged. The people seemed calm. Every one was idle. Folks stood at the front of their houses, looking curiously but silently on any passer-by.

We enquired about the general situation—if there were any Germans in the vicinity, and where they were. People seemed afraid to answer, but ultimately an elderly man told us that the town was occupied by the enemy's soldiers: that the Germans were patrolling all the roads leading to the town, and that they were everywhere, but nowhere in particular. We asked whether the road to Lessines was free of the Germans. The only answer we got was, "It may be—or it may not," which, to say the least, was not particularly enlightening.

When we told our listeners that we had come through from Antwerp, they were absolutely thunderstruck! We told them all the latest news of the war. But I am afraid most of the people we spoke to did not believe a single word we said. I think they became doubly suspicious of us when we told them we had come direct that day from Antwerp.

So the Germans were all round the town! This was not very pleasing news, but our luck had up to



now held good, so we did not worry much about our danger. We left Grammont and set off on the way to Lessines, where we had another very narrow escape. We had just crossed the small bridge over the river Dendre, when we were stopped from running into a German patrol by a crowd of helpers who had gathered round a big dray horse which had, luckily for us, fallen down. The civilians saw us coming with as much bewilderment and wonder as had been occasioned among the people of Grammont. They motioned us to stop and turn. So we did not enter Lessines after all, but went off rapidly on the road to Frasnes.

By this time it was getting dusk. The whole countryside was desolate and lonely. We saw no motor-cars: no conveyances of any description. Here and there a few peasants were in the fields. The way-side cottages seemed devoid of life. It was all somewhat weird and uncanny. Even the light was of a peculiar indescribable colour. Albert and I hardly spoke a word. We thought much, however.

From Lessines to Frasnes, the road ran long and narrow, with big chestnut trees along its edges. The surface was good and we were running along at fifty miles an hour. If all went well, we would soon arrive in Tournai and satisfy our curiosity. About half-way towards Frasnes, we began to meet straggling refugees. First we met them in ones and twos, then whole families came along, all carrying loads of goods, clothes and other belongings.

A queer incident occurred which will illustrate the terrified state of the poor peasants' minds. On our left we saw in the fading light the glow of a big fire. Interested in this, we stopped the car and asked a man who was passing with a child in his arms, if there were any Germans about.

The man, who was hatless, by the way, shied at our presence. Then he shook his head, pointed to the big fire on our left, and ran away from us as hard as he could without having spoken a word!

The fugitives thinned away. We raced on as hard as we could until we met a man who was pushing a perambulator with a young infant in it. Behind him were two women, the younger with a child in her arms, the elder carrying a big bundle. The man waved his arms excitedly to us, so we jammed on the brakes of the car and slid to a standstill.

He asked us whether we were going to Tournai, and on being told that we were he begged us to save his wife and children. They belonged to Leuze, he said, which was a town a few kilometres to our left. The Germans were burning down everything they came across, including the little brewery which belonged to this unhappy man.

We answered that our time was precious, but if they would leave the perambulator on the roadside and jump into the car at once we would be very pleased to take them all with us to Tournai. Then happened a comic-tragedy of the war. The elder woman was the man's mother-in-law, and she was the only wife's mother I've ever met who really

lived up to the cruel things that are said about them.

"Are you going to go fast?" she asked us. You must remember the Germans were all round us and we had to make a dash for safety if we wanted to avoid being captured.

"Yes, yes," said Albert impatiently. "We have been travelling ninety kilometres an hour up to now. We will have to increase our speed to a hundred kilometres."

Then came the incredible answer—

"In that case we will certainly not go with you. I cannot bear to travel fast."

Albert said, "Well—I'm—damned!" in English and could hardly suppress his feelings. It was so comical—so tragic—so utterly stupid—that we both had to laugh. Then Albert asked the woman indignantly if this was what the car had been stopped for.

The wretched man begged and implored his wife's mother to get into the car and escape at once, but without any effect on her determination. The wife, a weak-looking woman, stood looking at us with tears in her eyes, pressing her child to her breast. Then the man lost all control and cursed his mother-in-law lavishly. Then he pushed his perambulator ahead and went on his way, followed by a weeping wife and her fool of a mother. Albert was angry with the woman for hours after.

On we proceeded and soon we had the big blazing town of Leuze well behind us to our left. Near Frasnes the country became hilly and open, so we

had to be more cautious than ever. We stopped for a minute or two in Frasnes itself, and got all the information we could from the inhabitants, who were really useful to us, telling us as best they could about the movements of the Germans.

In Frasnes, also, we were told that the French had been in Tournai the day before, but we could not get any information as to the number of soldiers who were there.

Another ten miles took us to the entrance to Tournai, where we arrived in just sufficient twilight to enable us to travel without our lamps being lit. Entering the town we found evidence of a German visit. On both sides of the highway leading to the new iron bridge over the Scheldt, were many burnt houses, including the Gendarmerie, whose blackened walls and gaping glassless windows reminded us of so many other wrecked towns.

We crossed the bridge and came to the church, opposite which we stopped to enquire about the general situation of things. There were no lights anywhere. The windows of all the houses were shuttered. A queer sensation came over us both. We saw what we thought were moving figures, so we chanced our luck and called out to them. Half a dozen men came slowly and hesitatingly towards us. We asked about the French soldiers who were supposed to be in the town.

A man from a shop near us came out and acted as spokesman. He asked us who we were. We told him and added that we had come from Antwerp. No one believed us! We could get no reply to



German prisoners of war at Bruges. Some are mere boys.



our question about the French soldiers. Albert said that we were so anxious to know that we had come all the way to Tournai to find out.

“That may be so,” said the shopkeeper, “but I’d like to see your papers before I believe you.” We got out our passes and passports, and after they had been handed round we managed to satisfy the men as to our position. They told us that the French troops, composed of two thousand Algerians and two squadrons of cavalry had left the town the night before and were now near Templeuve (but we were not told the exact place), and that the Germans had been in Tournai since that morning.

Here we were in as bad a plight as ever ! We had run through all manner of danger and trouble only to learn that far from the French force being able to come and help to save Antwerp, it had not been sufficiently large or strong to keep the Germans out of Tournai, but had itself been forced to retreat.

Just then a young man came up to us and reported that a German patrol was coming towards us. We jumped into the car and were about to turn round and set off on our way back again, when a boy came running to his father, who was one of the group of men around us, and said that some German cavalry were coming along in the direction of the bridge. This barred that road to us.

Quickly asking the way to Audenarde, we set off and were soon out of the town, running at full speed. And then after we had gone on for some distance, we found that by some mistake—possibly due to the excitement and haste of our departure

from Tournai—Albert had got mixed up in his directions on leaving the town, for he soon discovered that he was going the wrong way. When we reached a tiny little hamlet, we found that we were well on the way to St. Amand and Valenciennes—exactly in the opposite direction to which we wanted to go.

We were rather sore about this, but there was nothing to be done but to turn back and try and get past Tournai without having to pass through it. As we neared the outskirts of the town a man came out of a house, so we stopped and asked him the best way. The man, a chemist, offered to go with us and show us the way to avoid Tournai, on the condition that we should take him with us as far as Audenarde. To this proposal we assented gladly.

Trusting to our luck and implicitly to the man, we ran through a maze of small country by-roads, the lamps unlit and the car running silently on the unpaved earth, and thus managed to avoid going through Tournai.

We crossed the twenty-three kilometres from Tournai to Renaix in silence and largely in darkness, only occasionally turning on the electric light of our head-lamps. On the way from Renaix to Audenarde, we met some Belgian soldiers and officers, to whom we reported all we had seen and heard. Then we made a dash for Ghent, had a well-earned welcome dinner there, and came back into Antwerp at midnight after a run of nearly two hundred and fifty miles.



## CHAPTER XXII

### WAERLOOS

THE Tuesday came before the end. The black clouds of war that had been steadily approaching Antwerp for two months were now overhead. The Germans were knocking at the gates of the city—knocking with heavy shells, and tapping impatiently with their smaller guns. It was only a matter of days before they must come in. Perhaps it would only be a matter of hours. Rumour succeeded rumour in the town. The spirits of the people went see-saw. One minute they would believe that all would be well; another minute they believed the Germans were at that time walking in.

I have one memory—I have a thousand memories, in fact—but I have one amusing memory of these last few days in doomed Antwerp. That is a memory of—good wine! I would meet a friend and he would invite me to his house—“For a last bottle of wine,” he would add with a forced laugh. And when I had gone with him, he would bring carefully a dusty bottle of a famous vintage.

“My grandfather laid that wine in his cellar,” my host would tell me, and then he would tell of all the wonderful wines he had known: of

the wonderful events on which the wine was drunk : of celebrations and anniversaries—

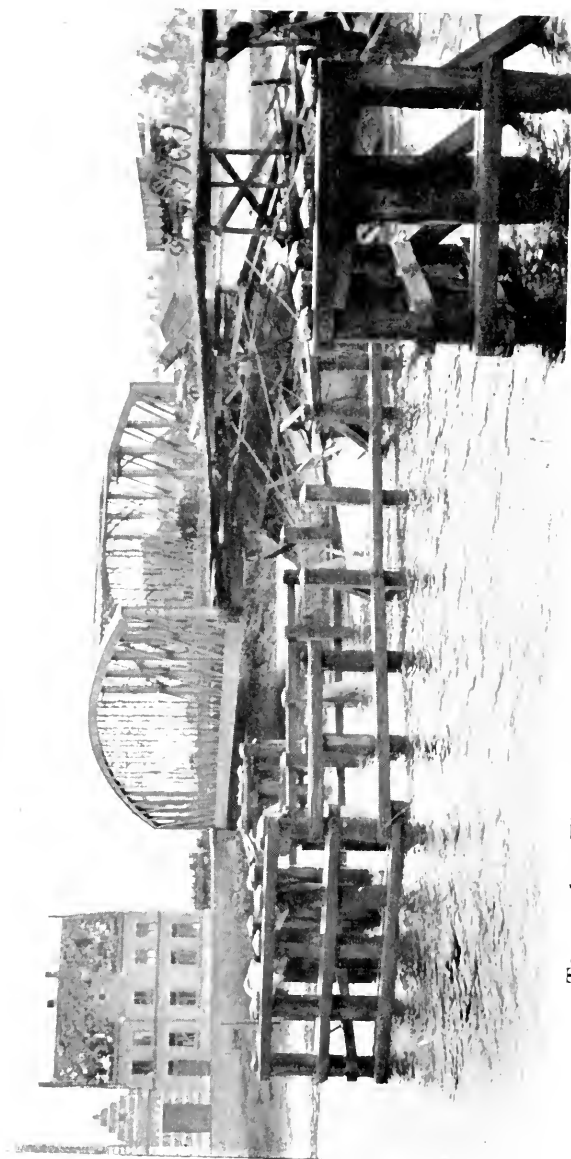
“ And now, Monsieur, ‘ To the Death of the Kaiser ! ’ ”

We drank that toast often in Antwerp. The good wine did not lessen the bitterness of the toast.

People knew now that the Germans would come. They tried not to admit that and they pretended to believe in all manner of wonderful things that would baffle the enemy's advance, but I think in their hearts they knew the end was near. At any rate, the best wines were drunk for the chief reason that the Germans should not have them. Antwerp knew of the trail of empty bottles that lay along the road the foe had come. And Antwerp knew of the crimes that had followed the drunken orgies of the drunken soldiers. Many wine cellars in Antwerp were emptied of their contents before the owners left, the wines being poured away rather than being allowed to remain.

Tuesday found folks with white faces and anxious eyes. About mid-day the Military Governor of Antwerp called together the directors of the various newspapers in the town, and told them, by the instrument of the Burgomaster, that it was time to prepare the population of the town for the invasion of the enemy.

One of the best men in the newspaper world in Antwerp told me about three o'clock of this meeting. He and the other directors had been



Termonde. The bridge over the Dendre, blown up by the Belgians.



asked to tell the population to keep very calm, to bring all weapons to the Town Hall, and to publish a lot of other recommendations of such import as to give a good insight of what the views of the military chiefs were at that time.

Of course, we were depressed. Personally, both Albert and I had had a strong belief in the combination of Belgian and English troops. Our hopes had risen only to fall with a crash and be broken. We could scarcely realise that the morrow might be our last day in the town. But we got into the motor-car and set off towards Waelhem in search of real information. We had not far to go to find out what we wanted to know.

The change at Contich was already appalling. This little town near Antwerp—so very close to the big city—was to all appearances dead. The life and colour of a day or two past were gone. The inhabitants had all fled. Not a single one remained. The windows were shuttered; the doors locked. It was the same as so many other Belgian towns had been.

Except for a passing flying column of gun ammunition which rattled on its way, we did not meet any one or anything until we came up to the iron railway bridge not more than half a mile further on. Some ambulance wagons were stationed here on the outer curve of the road. The men themselves were standing listlessly beside them. They looked silent and grim in the fading grey light.

On both sides of the hollows of the first slope nearby were the Belgian batteries. We could hear the crashing of the guns. They were answering the shrapnel fire of the Germans.

We ran along the first decline and up again to the top of the first slope, where on our left lay the little village of Waerloos. There was no one there except a few straggling soldiers retreating towards Antwerp. Desolation was everywhere. The fields were barren of any vegetation: the trampling of so many troops had laid them bare. We went along in the car and turned to our left where we sought shelter from the shrapnel bullets in the only street in the village.

Waerloos, where the brave Belgians were making a final stand, had only one street that wound its way through the village from one end to the other, so we ventured along it as far as we could until our progress was stopped by the schoolhouse, which was ablaze, and which stood out in the darkening surrounding district like a huge torch. The street was so narrow that we could not have passed without running the risk of having the car set on fire or the petrol tank exploded and ourselves burnt.

We left the car and went on foot with one wounded soldier. He told us that many wounded and badly hit men lay in the street at the other end of the village out of our reach. Time after time the church was struck. From where we stood we saw the crumbling spire change shape under the action of the shells.

This, I think, was the most perilous position we were in throughout the war in Belgium. We knew it, too. For the first time I had a real consciousness of peril. But somehow or other we didn't move. There was a terrible fascination in it all. Albert was so depressed that he never thought of his own safety. He confessed this later. In his mind, he told me, he had seen Antwerp as it would be. He had thought of Termonde and Aerschot and Malines and Louvain, and somehow or other all thoughts of personal safety went.

A gust of wind blew the flames of the burning school the other way, so without thought we made a dash through and past the flames of the burning building and reached the other end of the village. We found there some poor, miserable-looking soldiers, standing with their backs to the wall. Dirty and grimy, they had retired to the shelter of the village from the near battlefield. Some had been wounded while crossing the distance from the trenches to Waerloos. Some others had been hit in the village itself, which had long ago been absolutely deserted.

The desolation of all this scene! The burning village, the miserable exhausted soldiers with their looks of pain and despair, the roar of guns and the bursting of shells. We went back through the street with the wounded men. We helped those we could: others helped their comrades on. Every now and then we had to fall into doorways when the shrieking shrapnel burst overhead. We took what shelter we could.

From the soldiers we heard news that confirmed the rumours of the day. We knew openly what we had known in secret—that Antwerp, the invulnerable, was about to fall.

We reached the car by forcing our way through a hedge and getting past the burning houses by a slight detour. We loaded the car with wounded men. Then we drove back to where the Red Cross ambulances were and told them their services were needed in Waerloos. After that we set off for Antwerp. That was our last trip under our Red Cross flag. It was our last appearance south of Antwerp. On the return journey, Albert told me he was going to take his wife and relatives away next morning. He could not let them remain another day.

We took the wounded men to the Hospital Militaire, then went off to our respective homes.

Albert went that night to the houses of his relations, where he found boxes and bags were all packed, ready for a hurried flight. In several streets he saw motor-cars standing on the pavements outside houses. These cars remained there unattended all night. They were well equipped with petrol for early departure in the morning.

That was our last night in the town.



## CHAPTER XXIII

### EXODUS

ANTWERP rose early on Wednesday, October 7. Not every one had gone to bed. Of those who had, not every one had slept. There was great uneasiness amongst the people. The German shells were about to fall. The German guns were within shooting distance of the heart of the city. More British Naval troops had come to Antwerp, but the enemy was almost in the town by that time.

At five o'clock the newspapers came. In them was the "advice to the population" that we had been told of the day before. In them, too, was the announcement of the coming bombardment—which we had also known on the previous day, and which our trip to Waerloos had made certain beyond all hope. The town was soon very wide awake. Cars and cabs and conveyances of every description commenced to run through the streets from the earliest hours. Nearly everybody made hurried preparations for flight to the coast or to Holland. Few townsfolk had any desire to await the arrival of the enemy. Coming events cast their shadows before. The shadow of the Hun was already darkening the streets.

There were no trains running to the coast. Any trains that were running—and I do not know for certain if such a service existed—went no further than St. Nicholas. There were two ways of escape open to those who had no vehicles—a boat to Holland, or a walk on foot. Tugs and boats and small craft of every description were in very great demand. Most of them were already crowded to excess. Not all the money in the world could have secured a berth on some of them.

Albert, who had left his car all night on the pavement in front of his door, was lucky enough to find a cargo steamer belonging to one of the leading firms in Antwerp. Through the kindness of the owner, whom he knew, his wife and relations got berths on her. The steamer was the *Comtesse de Flandres*—bound for Zeebrugge with a cargo of wheat. On board this ship the passengers were carried. The captain turned out to be a friend of Albert's.

Then, having settled the passage of his relations, Albert returned to the town, met me and arranged to leave Antwerp as soon as possible. His intention was to go to Zeebrugge by road, meet his wife and relations there, see them on board a ship for England, and then go to Ostend and join the retreating army. If necessary he would motor to France and follow the war there as well as do more Red Cross service. The owner of the *Comtesse de Flandres* had proved such a good friend to Albert that he agreed to take him in the car with us.

Down to his office in the Place de Meir we went. Then about seven o'clock in the morning we went from one bank to another to try and get some of the firm's money. The directors, however, had joined in the general exodus. In the five banks we visited there was not a single man who had enough power to do anything for us on his own initiative! This was, to put it mildly, annoying. We returned to the shipowner's office and gathered together hurriedly the most important of the firm's papers. Then with M. D—— and Commandant B—— we set off towards the pontoon bridge, across which was our only way to the other side of the Scheldt.

The big floating landing-stage and the square in front of it were one solid mass of people. Every kind of vehicle was there—motor-cars, cabs, wagons, carts, and even wheelbarrows. People of all classes—the wealthiest and the poorest—were packed in a dense mass. There was one object in everybody's mind—to get across the water as quickly as they could. And still they came—in vehicles, on horseback, on foot. Pushing and striving so that the whole mass swayed forward as a gigantic unit, they struggled towards the landing-stage to which the pontoon bridge was linked on the Antwerp side.

After a time, by dint of many exertions and much patience and considerable skill in driving, we got a place in the long line of military motor-cars that streamed towards the pontoon bridge. These military cars, of course, had the *pas* of

all civilian vehicles. When within a few yards of the landing-stage, the whole column of slowly-moving cars came to a sudden stop. A way was cleared for the squadrons of mounted chasseurs with their horses, who were to pass over before we ourselves were allowed to cross the stage and the pontoon bridge. By this time the crowd in the square was so dense that the retreating army corps had very great difficulty to keep their line unbroken.

The sight around us was piteous in the extreme. Men and women, boys and girls and babies, peasants and townsfolk with drawn faces and haggard looks, all were in that human mass, looking like hunted animals. Antwerp, in these last days, was Belgium. Refugees from every part of the country had passed into the city every hour of the day. Thousands and thousands had already gone by steamer to England. Thousands were now in Holland, but thousands had still remained in the town.

Young mothers with their tiny babies in their arms were striving to shield them from the pressure of the jostling crowd. We saw a blind man, poorly and miserably dressed, his sightless eyes raised to the sky, swaying to and fro in the surging crowd. A young girl was leading him. She also was poorly dressed, her face white, her body ill-nourished. The man was clinging to the girl. She was hardly able to support him.

The Israelites at the Red Sea were not so unhappy as this Antwerp crowd. Their plight was





The Flight from Antwerp.



yd on the Landing Stage.





not so desperate. Oh, for a Moses to split the waters of the river Scheldt ! The pontoon bridge, its chains rattling, its iron plates clanking, was very narrow.

For over an hour we waited. Cavalry had passed us, and guns, and more horsemen, and then a column of infantry, and then, all of a sudden, there came to our ears a dreaded hum. The crowd looked up as one man. There, high above the town, coming from the south, was a big Taube, flying towards the river. As it neared us the crowd grew more and more terror-stricken. Fear clutched at their hearts. The mass rolled towards us and the broken line of passing infantrymen like a wave.

The Taube—the hated, terror-bringing Taube—was soon immediately above our heads. It had dropped much lower than it had been when we first sighted it. Then it started to circle round the pontoon bridge and the landing-stage and the square in which the people were massed. Immediately folks started to flee in every direction. I shall never forget that dreadful panic. The fear of a dropping bomb about maddened the people. In their rush to get into a place of shelter men and women fell on the ground and were trampled upon by the other people. Women shrieked and screamed in the agony of fear. Family groups got broken up in the scramble for safety. Mothers got separated from their children. The blind man was lost from our sight, like a feather in a rushing storm.

Men and women crawled under the stationary motor-cars. Some men actually crept beneath the bellies of the horses. Folk went everywhere in which the least shelter could be found. And still the Taube circled and circled—and nearly stopped above the fear-maddened crowd. Again there came to us that terrible fascination that kept us rooted to the spot. Any moment we expected a bomb to fall. God knows what terrible carnage it would have caused! But no bomb fell. The aviator, satisfied with his reconnoitring, left us, and the Taube headed towards the south again and was soon lost to sight.

The relief that came upon the people was overpowering. Women on all sides of us fainted away. We had to give them a cordial to fetch them back to consciousness. And the infantry line was broken. The head of our motor column was already on the pontoon bridge, and the other cars were proceeding ahead before they could be stopped, so we also continued on our way and were soon on the bridge with no possibility of turning back.

The pontoon bridge linked together the two sides of the river. I had crossed it on many occasions during the past weeks. It was laid across barges and was strongly built and cleverly devised. There was a section of these lighters in the middle. This could be withdrawn very easily to allow the passage of ships in the river. At this point of the Scheldt there is a breadth of about two thousand feet. The pontoon bridge

was so strongly constructed that any vehicle, no matter how heavy, could cross over it with safety. The big French guns, for instance, which were at the battle of Elewytt and Waelhem came over it without the slightest hitch. One thing I noticed on my first crossing. Every barge had a family on board, and on every barge was a little dog to guard it against the visits of thieves. These dogs were of all kinds. You would see them lying asleep in the sun or trotting about the tarred decks with a certain air of importance about them. I often wonder now what became of the lighters and their inhabitants and the little sentinels.

We reached the other side with a sigh of relief and not a little sad regret. We looked back to where the seething crowd was gathered on the opposite bank of the river, all striving to escape from the coming bombardment and the subsequent arrival of the foe. Our second feelings were more of regret than relief. There was the city we were leaving behind us, with its old Cathedral spire, tall and slender, immediately in front of where we were. I thought of a thousand things. I had a thousand memories. I thought of the sunlit streets, and the merry hours we had had in the busy cafés after we had passed from the horrors of the battlefield to the relief of the calm town. I thought of the darkened nights and of the little circle in the dim-lit lounge—the little circle that had grown smaller and smaller . . . I thought of the brave men who

had set out to fight and of the men who had come back crippled but undaunted. I thought of the men who had never returned. . . .

“It’s such a beautiful, beautiful city!” said Albert, softly.

There was a trembling in his voice and a look in his eyes that made me turn mine away.

We went over the rise at the other side of the river, rounded the corner of St. Anne’s main and only street—and we saw no more of Antwerp.

In connection with this terrible exodus from Antwerp I have something else to add. The newspapers, as I have said, had prepared the people that morning for the coming bombardment. The awakening of the trusting citizens to the peril at their gates was sudden and rude. A feeling of anger came over the townsfolk. Those who were not too panic-stricken to discuss the matter loudly cursed the responsible men who had not prepared the population of Antwerp sooner to the fatal issue, so as to give the people time to settle their affairs and to take measures of safety according to their means and circumstances. Perhaps the optimism of the authorities prevented them issuing warnings to the people earlier than they did—I do not know. But if I may be allowed to express an opinion, the case of Antwerp was rather hopeless after the fall of the chief outer forts the previous Friday—and the people might have been told of their danger so that they could choose for themselves

whether they remained in the town or not. I believe the British residents were warned by their consul on the Saturday.

Past St. Anne's, we found our journey slow. We had to crawl behind the advancing throng of soldiers and fugitives. All along the way we saw the same scenes as we had seen in Aerschot and Malines and Termonde and Alost and Waelhem—homeless people hastening everywhere out of the reach of the German soldiers. Here again we passed the crowd of civilians with their roughly-packed bags and bundles. The poor and the rich were all alike before the impossibility of using the value of money. Crippled and sound all struggled along. It was with a selfish but unavoidable feeling that we felt at that moment the luxury of the car that afforded us such a powerful means of travelling to safety.

When we arrived at Zwynndrecht, we branched off to Vracene so as to avoid the passage of the main road with its retreating army. Here we found the way much clearer and we were able to make better progress. Commandant B—— had been told of a special route which led us nearer to the Dutch frontier and which made travelling much easier. From Vracene we steered through a vast barren country of heath and sandy plains and pine woods to Kemseke, and from there along a lonely twenty miles, through the same scenery, to Selzaete, which is only two kilometres from the Dutch frontier.

All along the road, through the wayside villages,

we found the peasants busy packing up and loading their dog-drawn carts and wheelbarrows with their few belongings. Down through the little side roads they were going to Holland. Near the frontier we found many of them resting their tired limbs by the wayside. Some sat with their heads in their hands; they hardly looked up as we passed. They seemed to be sitting there considering their plight.

The sight of these people affected us very much. Our journeys in Belgium had not hardened us as much as we thought. Sometimes on that ride we wished we really had been a little less sensitive.

At Selzaete we took the road to Eecloo where we had lunch—although we had little enough appetite. After our meal we proceeded to Bruges, thence to Ostend, where we arrived about six o'clock in the evening after a run of over ninety miles. In Ostend one would never have thought of immediate danger. Everything was still quiet. The people were all optimistic. Many wealthy people had gone to live in Ostend and Maria-kerke in the belief that the Germans could never come as far as that. There was something of the ostrich-hiding-its-head-in-the-sand idea about this.

M. D—— and Commandant B—— left their luggage at a villa near the Kursaal, then we set off for Zeebrugge, which was only about fourteen miles away, with the intention of meeting the *Comtesse de Flandres* which would be about due



The Flight from Antwerp. A baby being handed down into the last boat to leave.





by the time we arrived. We passed Le Cocq, Wenduyn and Blankenbergh, all very much crowded but all very calm at that time. "Optimism" was the ruling word. But, indeed, the Belgian coast was such a delightful sight even at that time that somehow or other the general spirit of hope crept into our hearts. In our minds, I think, we had other ideas.

We arrived at Zeebrugge in the dark. The otherwise usually calm and quiet little place was full of bustle and noise. Everywhere, on all sides, we met ammunition wagons, guns, cavalrymen with horses saddled and unsaddled—and here at last we met the British soldiers in force—the khaki-clad men. In all the near fields close to the square near the newly-built railway station, in the direction of Blankenbergh, they were to be seen. We were so glad to see them that we almost forgot all our sorrows of the day. Hope sprang up so that it choked back the "Hurrah!" we meant to shout in reply to a "Cheer up!" from some of the men.

The *Comtesse de Flandres* had not arrived at this time, although she was due. We all arranged to meet in the morning. Our two fellow-travellers went back to Ostend by the electrical tramway and we stayed at the house of Albert's brother-in-law, who was harbour-master of Zeebrugge. We left the car near to the Palace Hotel, then we went down to the pier and watched the landing of the British troops.

The pier of Zeebrugge is exactly a mile long.

It stretched out its long curved arm into the sea in the direction of Flushing. It is an ideal landing place for an army. The middle curve is very broad: indeed it is nearly a hundred yards in breadth. The railway lines run along to the several big warehouses that have been built on it. Several other offices had been erected there also for the use of the evening travellers. Now, in days of peace, the company to which it belonged did not do enough dredging to keep the slow-moving sands low in the harbour itself, but as soon as war was declared a few extra dredgers very soon got the depth of water made to such a scale as to meet the requirements of any modern ships.

Hence it was that we saw in the blinding electric lights of the projectors on the quay six of the several important English transport liners, 15,000 tonners, fastened to the quay and pouring on it an unceasing stream of khaki-clad men, horses in boxes, wagons in slings, all lifted by the electric cranes of the quay and lowered on it, where the men formed up, the horses were hitched and the wagons were moved further on to finish completing their equipment.

There was such a bustle on the quay—the rattling of chains, the swinging arms of the cranes and derricks, the stamping of hoofs, the noise of running winches, the glare of the lights—that one would almost have thought oneself in one of the busiest docks of London or Liverpool—or Antwerp in the days before the war.

One thing appealed to us as particularly striking in the behaviour of the men and animals. There was hardly the sound of a voice. Everything was done in the quietest possible manner, with the most exemplary discipline, and in a no-hurry-but-business-meaning way. Even in the very little things that the British soldiers did, there was such a suggestion of strength and determination, that we really felt in our minds, this time, as well as in our hearts, a mixture of hope and confidence. I had become almost Belgian in my sympathies and even in my thoughts, but at this moment I was absolutely British and proud of it! We went to bed with calm minds.

We got up early next morning and scanned the sea for the ship we were expecting. It was not in sight. Albert left me and went to Ostend for M. B—— and Commandant B——. He returned with them about midday. But still no ship! He began to worry. At half-past three, however, we could see it coming in from the north. We learned later that owing to the presence of mines in the mouth of the Scheldt, the *Comtesse de Flandres* had been compelled to make a great detour to the north before she could steer in towards the port of Zeebrugge.

Mrs. de Keersmaecker and her relatives had had an exciting voyage. The ordinary time of the trip is ten hours. They had been thirty-six hours on the journey.

We all spent the night in an empty villa, sleeping

on the floor on mattresses and rugs that we had managed to borrow. On the next day—Friday—we went to Ostend again, where the news of the fall of Antwerp was steadily affecting the former calm of the town. The passenger boats were still running between Ostend and Folkestone—Dover, the former end of the line, was closed for military reasons. Ostend became feverish. News and contradictions of every kind flowed in from all directions. Thousands of refugees still flocked in from the country to seek a passage to England. Nearly all the well-known citizens of Antwerp were still to be seen in Ostend at that time. The continuous flow of people and soldiers from Antwerp, Bruges and Ghent even, had been the means of reducing the stock of provisions in the town so that on the Sunday morning no bread or eggs or even cheese was to be had.

On the day before, Saturday, October 10, news had come to us of the Germans' advance towards the coast. They were said to be about seven or eight miles below Bruges. During the night the British troops had left the neighbourhood of Zeebrugge, and there were no longer any ships moored to the quay of the pier. These indications were sufficient for us to understand the situation. We got all the luggage of our party loaded on a dray and taken to Ostend, where we also went and spent the night in a little hotel. On the Sunday, Albert found that the offices of the town hall had been stupidly shut, so that, had it not been for the kind interference of a

friend, he would have had to lose a day through not being able to have his passports stamped.

By this time Albert had made up his mind, on the appeals of his wife and other relatives, to leave the Continent with them, instead of remaining on as he had intended to do. He left the car in charge of a friend who was serving in the army and was retreating towards Furnes and Dunkerque. The passage tickets had all been obtained, the luggage had been sent on board one of the steamers, and Albert was ready now to leave for England. I arranged to stick to the car and go on with it that day to Dunkerque. My trip turned out to be quite uneventful.

That day was the culmination of the panic of the coast people. Four ships had already left for England that morning; a fifth would sail at eleven o'clock. The halls and quays were black with people awaiting a boat. And the refugees still arrived. Ostend was undergoing the same experience as all the other cities. The Germans were in Ghent and were entering Bruges. The flow of the enemy was running towards the coast and everybody became aware of the peril of being cut off from retreat. Many fled in the direction of France—by road, by rail, by any route whatever. Others still tried to skirt the sea, and flee to L'Ecluse in Holland. The Government had gone to Le Havre. People scurried in all directions; the sight was bewildering. And during that time Albert was waiting patiently for the coming boat.

Of that voyage to England I must write in the words of my friend.

“The steamer was no sooner moored to the quay than the people simply rushed it. There was hardly any control whatever. At the very last moment, almost by sheer violence, I managed to get the ladies in our party on board. I myself was the last one to jump on the boat that day. It was already overcrowded.

“The commander of the *Princesse Henriette* was the brother of an old friend of mine, and through his kindness we found a little cabin in which we sheltered the old folks and the children of my party. The ship was full of poor refugees. In every corner of the boat were refugees from every part of Belgium. Here was a baker from Aerschot—a widower with five little children. His wife had been killed. There was a little group of orphan children in charge of a grave middle-class woman. Every one had a story of woe and sorrow to tell.

“We all looked towards the coast we were leaving, to say a last farewell to our beloved little Belgium. When the captain dipped his flag, tears sprang to the eyes of all those that were still able to weep. The land we were leaving was the land of our forefathers, where the glorious past had left relics of splendours few countries in the world have ever achieved. The land of Rubens and Van Dyck and the Van Eycks—the fathers of painting, of Juste Lipsius and all arts. We loved Belgium so much because

it was so small and full of reminiscences. The folk-lore there was richer than in any other country in the world. The people were so hospitable and so good-humoured.

“Late in the day we came in sight of the shores of ‘Old England’—which, to me at least, were not strangers. Here in England, we have found a refuge from our devastated cities until we can go back to Belgium to rebuild our homes and towns. I cannot express our gratitude for the reception we Belgians have had in England. It has surpassed all our dreams of welcome. England has done what no country has ever done in the history of the world. She has fed our hungry, clothed the poor, and provided for all the needs of the homeless people.

“This will never be forgotten. If England thinks that what she has done was due to us for the way in which we sacrificed our country, let it also be remembered that we Belgians did no more than our duty to our word, and it does not matter so much if we lose all our material possessions provided we still keep our honour. That alone is an inestimable heritage for our children.”

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE BATTLE OF THE COAST

**A**NTWERP to Ostend, thence to Nieuport, then Furnes, away on the eastern edge of France, but still in Belgium. A shattered army with an unconquerable soul. A King whose palace lay in the hearts of his devoted men, his mansions of another day possessed by Prussian vandals. I saw the mud-stained, unshaved men set out to battle—and the whole tragedy of the war came surging to mind. More than the burnt, wrecked cities, more than the unknown dead, more than the shrapnel shriek and the whistling shell, the little army that remained brought hot tears to my eyes. You should have seen them in the little grey Flanders town in the early morning. You should have seen them lined up in the quaint old square. For a minute they were drilled, then off they'd march to battle—"Un-deux . . . un-deux . . . un-deux"—heads proudly held and brave hearts unafraid. One-fifth of what had been. . . .

There was a scarcity of food in Furnes. The soldiers had plenty, but we who were "not supposed to be there" had not. "Plus de tabac," said the shops, and "Plus de pain." There was





Mr. Scotland Liddell beside a wrecked motor-car near Furnes.



not a single cigarette in the town; not a bar of chocolate; no tinned food in what shops I entered. One morning—it was two days after my climb up to the spire—I breakfasted on dry bread and very hard cheese. For a beverage I drank “Pax”—a drinking water with a name strangely out of place. Then I set out towards Pervyse on foot with Mr. T. E. Grant of the *Daily Mirror*. I missed the luxury of the motor-car. A drizzle of rain was falling, and the roads were muddy and greasy, making walking difficult. To make matters worse, we had proceeded well on the way when a very polite French officer told us that we had gone far enough. . . . “Two days after the battle, messieurs,” said he, “you can come back.” And he smiled at us quite charmingly, so that argument with him was impossible.

Therefore we had to go a long way round to get past him towards Pervyse. It still rained and it was cold, and I was very hungry. Food had been scarce for two days. We walked on towards the burning houses in the distance—towards where the little balloon-shaped clouds hung in the sky—and I felt that unless I had some food I must drop down! We reached a cottage. In the little stack-yard beside the house were French soldiers. I asked one for a piece of bread. “Avec plaisir, monsieur,” he said, and got a very big loaf out of a sack in a cart and cut off a chunk with his pocket-knife. This was after we had declined the loaf itself. At the same moment a French Red Cross man came out

of the cottage. He was a volunteer and had been at Oxford University.

"Ah!" he said, greeting us with great enthusiasm, "come inside. You cannot eat dry bread." "Can't I?" said I, with a laugh. "You don't know how hungry I am."

He insisted on us entering the cottage with him, so he took us round to the back door and ushered us into a particularly dirty little scullery-kitchen. It was crowded with other French soldiers. They all greeted us cordially, forced us into chairs, put a pan on the stove and proceeded to make soup for us—out of a little packet. They also opened a tin of beef and a jar of pickles. They were well stocked with provisions.

Now it was exactly like picnicking. In the midst of war—why, one almost forgot that there was a battle going on. We were commencing on the beef when a shell exploded behind the house, rattling the windows menacingly. We had eaten quite half the meat when another shell dropped near us, and in front of the house this time. One of the men was beginning to boil coffee for us in the soup-pan when he was hastily summoned into the front room of the cottage—just through the door—to attend to one of the soldiers who had been brought in from outside with his right hand torn to pieces by a fragment of the shell. In a moment, as it were, we had plunged again into horror. In the short time we were in the cottage, the whole surroundings had been transformed.

Some stacks in front were now afire. Huge



A German officer, a prisoner, saluting the Belgian flag as he passes it.



holes, shell-made, were in the fields. Wounded men were struggling in towards the little haven. French artillery that had been brought up were opening fire from near some bushes. A wounded horse lay writhing near at hand. Along the road towards Pervyse lay men who had died scarcely ten minutes before. Towards Furnes we found wounded horses standing bleeding by the wayside, some free, some harnessed to ammunition or transport or Red Cross wagons. They were all injured in the back by shrapnel bullets. There were gaping, raw wounds there, and the blood had flowed down their legs until it had matted the hair and hardened, forming a glistening varnish on the wretched beasts. They stood, heads down, great eyes full of pain and a wonder that this should have happened to them. Laurence Sterne is said to have wept over a dead donkey. I can understand now.

All along the road were camps in wayside farmyards. The ground was strewn with straw on which tired men were resting. Many of these men had been eight or nine days in the trenches. They were having a "day off" now—but they were only a mile or so behind the Belgian lines, and were still in sight of the German shrapnel clouds and the German big shells and the burning towns of Ramscapelle and Pervyse and Dixmude. They were still within sound of the artillery fire.

We saw two soldiers in different farmyards running after chickens, while their comrades looked on the chase with amusement. We saw several

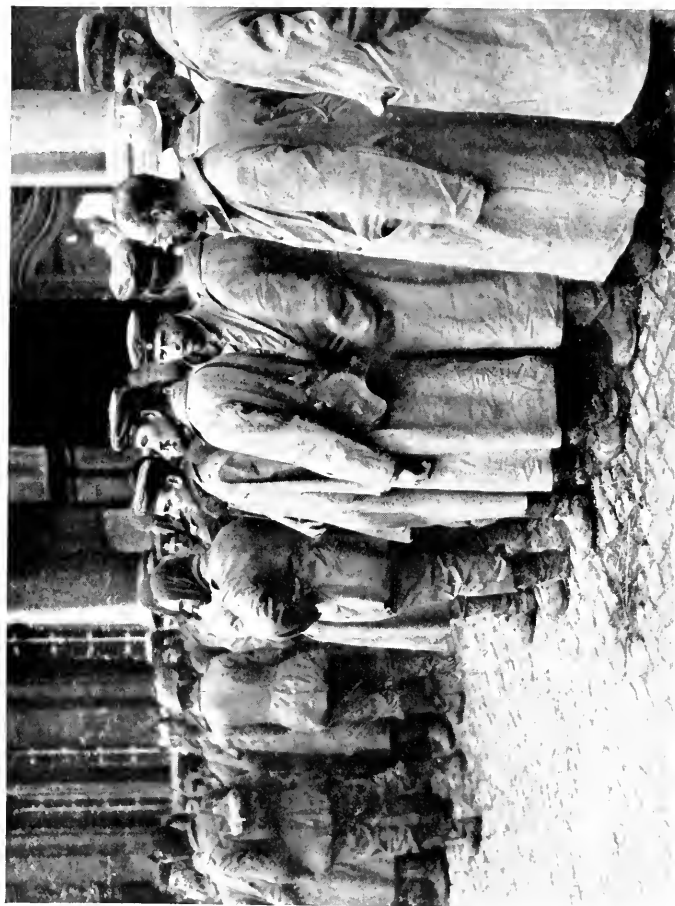
little groups of men skinning fowls—they really skinned, not plucked, them—by the roadside and roasting them on wood fires. We saw two artillery-men milking a stray cow. We saw fat pigs grubbing about near the military kitchens, while the men cast longing eyes at them. There were more dead horses in the fields, too. There was also a military motor-car in a ditch. It had been wrecked the night before.

Many wounded and sick white-faced men were walking into Furnes. And suddenly we came to another road along which a crowd of German prisoners were being marched. We walked alongside them to the town. Near Furnes the roads were lined with soldiers. In silence they watched the prisoners go by. There were ninety-two white-faced Germans—two officers and ninety men. Many of them were hatless. Some of them had dirty bandages around their heads. Some had woollen scarfs in place of helmets. Quite a number had big round goggles on. They were about as miserable-looking a crowd as I have ever seen.

Just before they entered the street that crossed the railway lines, when they were marching along an avenue of trees, they passed a Belgian flag-bearer who had the standard of his regiment on his shoulder. One of the German officers saluted it as he passed. Tom Grant had climbed to the top of a Limousine car by this time, so he managed to get a photograph of the incident.

Through the streets of the little Flemish town they went. The townsfolk hissed and groaned





German prisoners at Furnes, West Flanders. Many of these were boys of 16½ and 17.



as the prisoners went by. One big man jeered at them.

“La Route de Paris !” he shouted. “La Route de Paris.”

The crowd laughed at the gibe.

The men were marched to the Grand Place—to the building up whose spire I had climbed. King Albert watched them from a first-floor window. There was only sadness in his face. Tom Grant took another photograph of the men, while I got behind a cart so that I was able to speak to some of the Germans without being stopped. Many of them were mere boys. One that I questioned was only sixteen and a half. Several others were schoolboys of seventeen. They had, they told me, had practically no training. After a few days' instruction in the handling of a rifle they were packed off to the front. At Dixmude they had been captured.

When they were ordered into the corner building, next the Belgian Military Headquarters, they lay down at once on the straw-covered floor and fell asleep from utter exhaustion. After a time they were marched off to the railway station and taken away by trains to some unknown destination.

Late that afternoon I saw a dreary procession of wounded Belgians come into Furnes. Some of them had been eight days in the trenches. They were caked with mud. Most of them were walking. Some were bare-footed. Some were without boots, stumbling along the slippery roads in their socks.

Sick men were helping wounded comrades along. All were ragged and grimy and utterly tired.

The Grand Place was crowded with motor-cars. Gun-carriages were lined up for their journey to the front. Little groups of soldiers sat at the small round tables on the pavement in front of the cafés in the square. Staff officers—British and French and Belgian—stood in groups in front of the Belgian army headquarters. I looked up at the building and I saw the King again. A few weeks before I had seen him in the firing line—tall and straight and every inch a MAN. At a first-floor window, behind quaint, diamond-shaped panes, sat the King of the Belgians. His face was close up to the window—his chin resting on his hand. The sadness of his face was tragic. He was looking out across the Grand Place to where the long line of limping men was coming in from the trenches. The pain in the faces of the tired-out, battle-stained men was as nothing to the pain in the fine face of their sympathetic soldier King.



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